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THE NEW REPUBLIC

Remembering Cardinal O'Connor
NAT HENTOFF
Abandoning Sierra Leone
THE EDITORS

MAY 22, 2000

Father Knows Best

George Bush, our best modern president

By JONATHAN RAUCH

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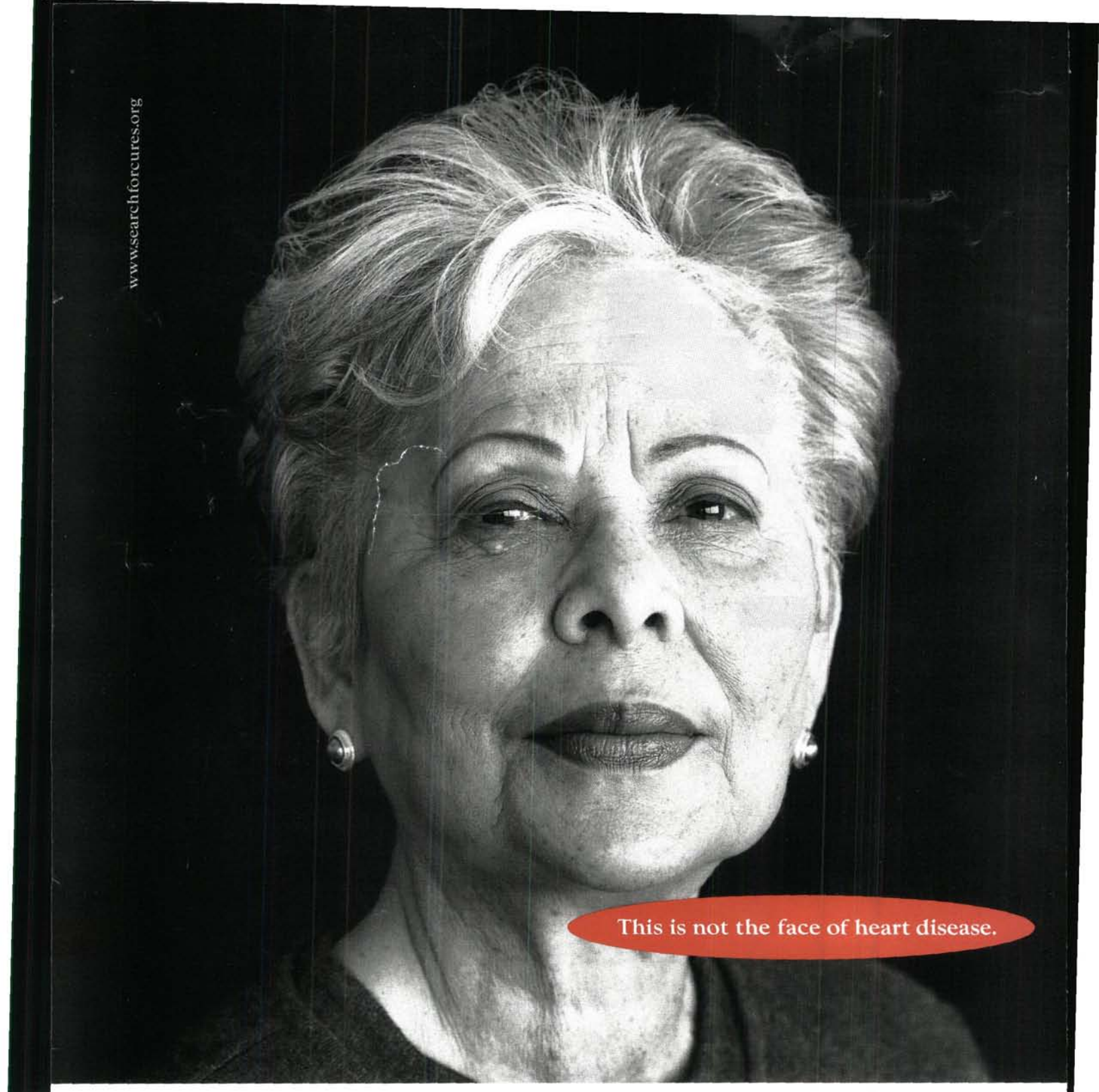

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A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
MAY 22, 2000
ISSUE 4,453

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On the Cover : Illustration by THOMAS FUCHS
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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 222, Number 21, Issue 4,453, May 22, 2000. (Printed in the United States on May 10, 2000.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated January 3, April 17 & 24, July 10 & 17, and August 28 & September 4, 2000) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. For advertising inquiries, please contact Ann Rossaki at (202) 331-7494 or Shannel Myers in our NY sales office at (212) 924-8700. Yearly subscriptions, $59.94; foreign, $99.94 (U.S. funds); Canada, $79.94 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $4.00 (includes postage & handling). © 2000 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 331-0275. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: tnr@aol.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call 1-800-827-1289 or visit our website at www.tnr.com.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Zero tolerance

TO THE EDITORS:

Jeffrey Rosen's "Excessive Force" (April 10) is based on a deceit and a misconception. The deceit is Rosen's assertion that New York's success in reducing crime is based on a devil's bargain in which the city is willing to accept the death of innocent civilians in order to keep criminals under control. Rosen asserts that there's a consensus in New York, including even liberals, that assumes that if the police are prevented from "shooting the occasional innocent man ... criminals will rule the streets once more." Rosen gives literally no evidence for this hyperbolic claim. That's not surprising. If he had acknowledged the statistics—his article gives us not a single number—he would have had to report that police killings have dropped as dramatically since 1990 as crime has. Murders in New York have declined by 70 percent, and police killings of civilians have dropped almost 75 percent, from their high of 41 in 1990 under former Mayor David Dinkins to eleven in 1999. In fact, they are now at a historic low.

Rosen, whose article is based on little more than a Nexis search and conversations with a few law professors, has an erroneous conception of "broken windows" policing. Rosen defines broken windows, which he favors, as giving cops "broad discretion to prosecute or not prosecute low-level offenses in order to deter the social disorder that breeds more serious crime." That's accurate, as far as it goes. He then describes zero-tolerance policing, which he blames for brutality in New York, as a means not of deterring crime but of discovering it "in the hope that turnstile jumpers and pot smokers may also be guilty of more serious offenses." This is simply wrong. The bright line Rosen wants to draw between broken windows as deterrence and zero tolerance as discovering crime never existed. The idea of using arrests for low-level crimes to catch serious criminals was an integral part of broken windows from 1990 on, when, in a "eureka" moment, Police Commissioner William Bratton discovered that "in some stations" one in seven of the people caught jumping turnstiles was carrying an illegal weapon or was wanted for serious felonies.

The city's racial demagoguery aside, the policing issue in New York is neither brutality nor police killings; the NYPD is among the very best police departments in the nation in both those categories. The concern—the real devil's bargain—is the trade-off between the number of "stop and frisks" by special units and the hostility they produce. This involves a paradox. First, every bit of evidence suggests that, as police have restored order and reduced gun carrying, crime has dropped. Murder aside, New York had 55,000 fewer robberies in 1999 than in 1990. Second, as police succeed in reducing the number of people carrying guns, "success"—taking a gun off the street—is more elusive. The risk is that police fruitlessly frisk an increasing percentage of innocent people, which the public sees as petty harassment. This is the pattern Rosen's hyped-up rhetoric is trying to get at—a serious generic problem in policing. Special units targeting weapons or drugs can have a major impact on the level of violence in a city, yet they risk alienating the very citizens who benefit most from them. Discovering when, under what conditions, and for how long special units concentrating on a narrow range of offenses should be used has never been resolved. On one hand, it can be argued that the NYPD has succeeded marvelously in reducing violent crime and that the city is approaching a threshold beyond which further attempts at reduction are too costly; on the other hand, 700 murders a year—the current number—is a lot, and violence is still too prevalent in many poor neighborhoods.

As for the rest of Rosen's article, his failings are compounded by an error-ridden account of homeless policy in the '90s. Dinkins did not appoint Bratton chief of transit police; Bratton was appointed by Robert Kiley, the head of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. On the alleged success of Koch/Dinkins efforts at improving public space by rezoning the homeless, we would suggest either that Rosen spent very little (if any) time in New York during those years or that he's simply parroting something he was told.

Rosen's article has implications beyond New York. Perceptions of policing in Gotham will continue to affect policing around the country. Already, the hysteria produced by people like Rosen is helping to undermine police reform in Baltimore.

In trying to call the integrity of the New York police into question, Rosen has raised questions about his own reliability.

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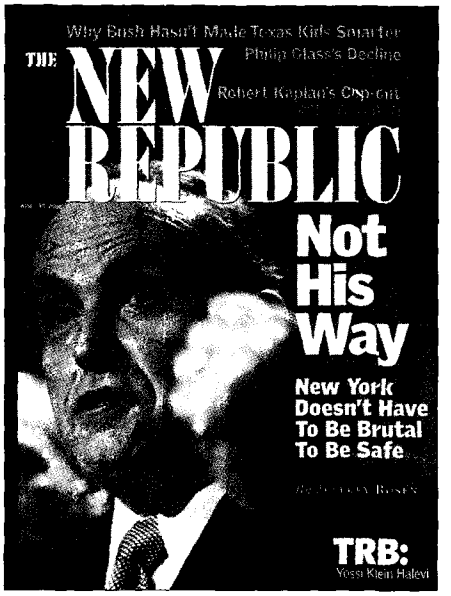
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Not His Way
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JEFFREY ROSEN REPLIES:

George Kelling and Fred Siegel's defensive letter suggests that the architects of broken windows have more riding on the Amadou Diallo and Patrick Dorismond cases than meets the eye. They have devoted their careers to defending broken-windows policing, and their professional reputations therefore depend on the ability of politicians and the general public to draw a sharp distinction between broken windows on one hand and zero tolerance on the other, even though the two approaches are analytically intertwined. My article suggested that such a distinction was possible. After reading Kelling and Siegel's letter, I'm less confident that it is.

In a careless misreading of my first paragraph, which colors their entire response, Kelling and Siegel take me to task for offering no statistics to support the "hyperbolic" claim that New York has made a devil's bargain, accepting the death of innocent citizens in order to reduce crime. I offered no statistics because I presented this as an absurd and mistaken claim—I called it "nonsense"—fostered by Giuliani's "zero tolerance" rhetoric itself.

I was surprised by this obvious misreading until I looked up Siegel's TNR article on Mayor Rudy Giuliani ("Rudy Awakening," April 19, 1999). The article attributed Giuliani's success in crime fighting to the wisdom of his first police chief, William Bratton, whom Kelling advised. According to Siegel's account, Bratton was forced out by Giuliani because he argued that "after street crime had been reduced through broken-windows policing, community policing should be given a bigger role." This narrative is flattering to Bratton and Kelling, but it is not convincing. I argued that, during Bratton's tenure

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as police commissioner, broken-windows policing morphed into its antithesis, zero-tolerance policing, even though Bratton subsequently tried, in his book, to downplay his own role in the transformation. My article never claimed, as Kelling and Siegel's letter suggests, that there was a "bright line" when broken windows morphed into zero tolerance; on the contrary, I argued that "the precise moment of transformation is hard to pin down," but that it occurred "on the watch of Bratton, whose 1998 book, *Turnaround*, proclaims allegiance to broken windows while in fact endorsing a less flexible approach." The deterrence and crime-discovering strategies of broken windows were indeed intertwined since the beginning of the '90s, but, as Bratton's book makes clear, many cops under his watch came to see the arrest of turnstile jumpers as an end in itself rather than a means of deterring other crime. Thus, Bratton is far more responsible than he, Kelling, or Siegel wants to acknowledge for transforming the discretion-based approach of broken windows into the discretionless approach of zero tolerance.

Similarly, I didn't mean to suggest that Dinkins himself appointed Bratton but that Bratton was appointed during the Dinkins administration. As for the Koch/Dinkins efforts at rezoning the homeless in the early '80s, I was growing up in New York at the time, but my account was taken from Mitchell Duneier's new book, *Sidewalk*. It has many more fascinating details about the experience than Siegel and Kelling offer, but none of them were directly germane to my argument.

As my article made clear, Kelling deserves respect for his pioneering work with James Q. Wilson on the importance of discretion in order-maintenance policing. But, by refusing to acknowledge the hydraulic pressures that have transformed broken windows into its antithesis, Kelling and Siegel have allowed their own parochial interests to distort an important debate.

Unreal

TO THE EDITORS:

In his review of my book *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post-Cold War*, Robert Kagan says I am amoral ("Inside the Limo," April 10). Yet he ignores the last essay in the collection, "The Dangers of Peace," which deals with moral responsibility. There, I argue that a society whose overriding goal is peace is a society unaware that it must fight and make sacrifices for its principles; that consensus can be the handmaiden of evil because fighting dictators requires executive leadership that operates outside consensus; that the United States might form a global constabulary force arising out of NATO to intervene in humanitarian emergencies; that the ideological divisions of the cold war were ones to be proud of, because they represented good over evil; and in a post-cold-war world our challenge will be finding new goals to give our society meaning. The last essay concludes not with "cheap pessimism" but with a quote from Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" about Colonel Robert Shaw and his African American Civil War heroes, who chose to die for their beliefs rather than accept "a savage servility."

Kagan suggests I am morally obtuse because I do not value individual rights and liberty as much as goods and security. I reject this narrow interpretation of morality. Doesn't liberation from hunger, filth, and malaria also count as an individual right? Kagan implies that that is "an easy judgment to make when one lives in New York." I didn't make that judgment in New York. I made it after suffering cerebral malaria in Uganda in 1986, knowing that millions of Africans suffer that fate daily; and they would easily tolerate a Lee Kuan Yew to escape it. For millions who have seen armed bandits and ethnic riots—not to mention disease that comes from the breakdown of irrigation systems—security is no abstraction. I worry in print that liberal democracy may not be the last word in human political evolution not because I am morally obtuse but because I have seen firsthand how difficult it is to establish. Kagan uses the Founders in support of worldwide democracy. Here is Jefferson in an 1802 letter about Czar Alexander I: "Some preparation seems necessary to qualify the body of a nation for self-government. Who could have thought the French nation incapable of it?" That is no longer true of France and many nations, but it is true of others.

If only Kagan's kind of moral arguments are necessary for the United States to do good works, then why did polls show the public was deeply ambivalent about intervention in Bosnia even after media revelations of war crimes? The low tolerance for American casualties demonstrates the limits of what the public will accept in humanitarian interventions, absent pragmatic motives.

Kagan implies that the authoritarian ideal is the culmination of my thinking. I support authoritarian regimes in places like Egypt and Tunisia only because I fear something worse, morally speaking. Realists face up to these issues and search for the best outcomes under the circumstances. That is moral.

Kagan—who does not limit himself to quoting from the book under review—says I see the future of the world and of the United States wholly darkly. In an August 1998 *Atlantic Monthly* cover story, I celebrate a vibrant multiracial civilization taking shape along the Pacific Coast. I do the same in *An Empire Wilderness* about uplifting struggle and change in Omaha, the Oklahoma Panhandle, western Montana, and so forth. In *The Ends of the Earth*, my large section on Iran is upbeat about the prospects for civil society there; published in 1996, it ran against the grain of pessimism then about Iran. My views are contradictory because the world is that way and I describe what I have experienced. I do not welcome a hybrid regime in the United States. Yet I worry about a hollowing-out of democracy as we spend more time in private than in public spaces and are increasingly dominated by corporate decision-making.

Kagan says the Founders were "tragic idealists," not "tragic realists." Madison writes: "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.... If men were angels, no government would be necessary." Is that not realism? Kagan says I overestimate the Founders' concern with stability, yet they were intrigued by ancient Sparta because its mixed regime lasted for hundreds of years. Kagan says I don't grasp Tocqueville's theory of "democratic despotism," which he says is not about despotism but about "tyranny of the majority." That is still despotism. Kagan says I am wrong that the Peace of Westphalia began the "era of organized nation-states." The Columbia Encyclopedia says: "It marked the end of the Holy Roman Empire and inaugurated the modern European state system."

ROBERT D. KAPLAN
Starkbridge, Massachusetts

ROBERT KAGAN REPLIES:

First of all, I wrote in my review that Kaplan "is probably not amoral." But, yes, I believe he is "morally obtuse" for not valuing individual rights and liberty as highly as material goods and physical security. I believe he is wrong to argue that liberal democracy is not "the last word," i.e., the goal toward which all peoples ought to strive. The difference between Jefferson and Kaplan, which the latter can't seem to fathom, is that while Jefferson came to believe that some peoples (such as the French) might not be prepared for democracy at a given

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Us & Them

ONCE UPON A TIME, a Cuban boy was rescued off the coast of the United States, and his father was invited to visit him in the land of liberty. "I would hope the man would be able to see the great freedoms we have here," said America's leading Republican presidential candidate, Texas Governor George W. Bush. The boy's father, Juan Miguel González, accepted the offer. Having waited four months in Cuba, he cooled his heels in the United States for another two weeks before being allowed to see his son, Elián. This week, Juan Miguel begins a battle in federal court that will likely give him the right to take Elián back to Cuba. Many Americans will weep at the sight of a father leading his son back to a land of tyranny. They should weep, too, at America's part in the tragedy. We did not show Juan Miguel freedom. We showed him freedom's subversion.

Like others who have experienced no government other than Fidel Castro's, Juan Miguel came to this country knowing only what it is like not to be free. Soon after his arrival, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution enumerating Castro's abridgments of liberty. The commission criticized "the continued violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba, such as freedom of expression, association and assembly and the rights associated with the administration of justice." It called on Cuba "to guarantee the rule of law," to cease groundless detentions, and to allow "a freer flow of people and ideas," including "open contact with other countries."

Imagine, then, Juan Miguel's terrible lack of astonishment when he found the same liberties abridged in America. His son was detained. His rights as a parent were violated. His wishes were dismissed as a stooge's script. He was deprived of justice, the rule of law, and the right to return to his country with his child. Last November, when Elián was plucked from the sea and taken to his relatives in Miami, Juan Miguel asked that his son be returned to him. Instead, the Miami relatives went to court to thwart him, and American politicians joined the resistance. "Why won't he come to the United States ... so that we and others can make a determination of what his intent is?" Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott asked.

So, on April 6, Juan Miguel came. "Welcome to freedom," demonstrators shouted to him at the airport. But Castro's enemies in the United States, like Castro's henchmen in Cuba, refused to treat a heretic as a free man. No matter how often, how explicitly, and how far from Cuban government supervision Juan Miguel said he wanted to take his son home, neither the relatives who held Elián nor the politicians who stood by them would take him seriously. They kept the son from his father, insisting that Juan Miguel didn't really mean what he said, that he was only doing Castro's bidding. In Cuba, no one is surprised when a dissident is separated from his children and discounted as a mouthpiece of enemies of the state. But in America?

In Miami, hundreds of demonstrators surrounded the house where Elián was kept. "Freedom for Elián!" they chanted. But this was not freedom. The mob vowed never to let Elián be taken from the house. Men with violent criminal records and concealed-weapons permits formed a security apparatus to keep him in place. Into the teeth of this beast the Miami relatives dared Juan Miguel to come alone. His attorney, fearing that such a mission might endanger Juan Miguel's life, sought a reunion of father and son at a neutral site. The relatives refused. "They're going to have to come get him," said Elián's cousin Marisleysis.

The mob in Miami, like the regime in Cuba, nationalized Juan Miguel's child. "Everyone here sees Elián as their son, their grandson, their nephew," said one member of the throng outside the house. The demonstrators answered to no law and no person. They laughed when Attorney General Janet Reno revoked the Miami relatives' legal custody. When a deal was arranged to let Elián see his father, the mob protested and the relatives rejected the plan.

To save Elián from communism, the relatives and their supporters trumped up allegations worthy of a Communist show trial. On national television, attorneys for the relatives suggested—without evidence and contrary to an independent psychiatric evaluation—that Juan Miguel had abused his son. Other Cuban troublemakers, no doubt, have been blindsided by uncorroborated accusations of child abuse. But Juan Miguel is probably the first to experience that Castroite tactic at the hands of Castro's enemies.

Lest Elián be sent back to an island of indoctrination and stage-managed propaganda, the relatives indoctrinated and stage-managed him. They got him to sign an asylum application he could not read. They told reporters that the child had confided his fear of Juan Miguel. They released a video in which Elián, glancing off camera for cues from his minders, affirmed, "I want to stay here." Flipping through TV channels that day, it was impossible to escape the video. It must have reminded Juan Miguel of home.

What did the U.S. government do about this? In Miami, the police stood by as the mob tightened its grip on the house. The mayor would not let the police participate in Elián's rescue. In exchange for reuniting father and son, Reno extracted Juan Miguel's pledge to stay in the United States throughout the appeals process, which the Miami relatives vowed to pursue all the way to the Supreme Court. On April 19 a federal appeals court ruled that until the case is resolved, "all officers, agents, and employees of the United States ... are enjoined to take such reasonable and lawful measures as necessary to prevent the removal of plaintiff, Elián González, from the United States." Castro let Juan Miguel join his son in America. But America wouldn't let the father take his son home.

And what did the anti-Communist leaders of the U.S. Congress do? The same thing Cuba's Communist legislators would have done. First they said Juan Miguel was controlled by Castro. Once he was free of Castro, they said he was controlled by President Clinton, who was controlled by Castro. Then they argued that since Juan Miguel has no parental rights in Cuba, he should have none in America. "Fidel's constitution in Cuba states very clearly that children are the property of the state," explained House Majority Whip Tom DeLay. When federal agents finally extracted Elián from the house in Miami, congressional leaders were overcome by the raid's shameful irony. "My first thought," sputtered Lott, "was that this could only happen in Castro's Cuba."

No one should sugarcoat the fate that awaits Elián and Juan Miguel. Castro will parade them around as trophies of his filthy regime. A team of psychologists will help Elián "readjust" to the shackles of Communist life. The government will dictate Elián's education, monitor Juan Miguel's activities, and enlist father and son in domestic propaganda. Perhaps it had to end this way. Or perhaps, if we had shown Juan Miguel the freedom America truly represents, he might have stayed. Now we'll never know.

WILLIAM SALETAN

WILLIAM SALETAN is a senior writer at *Slate.com*.

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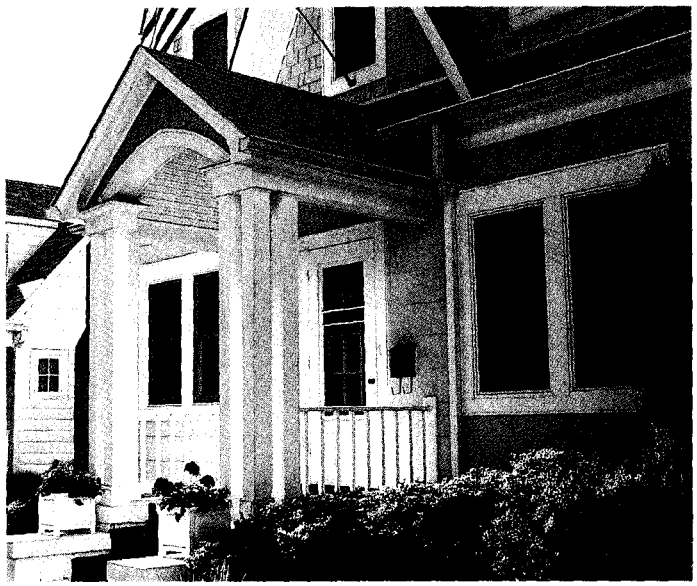

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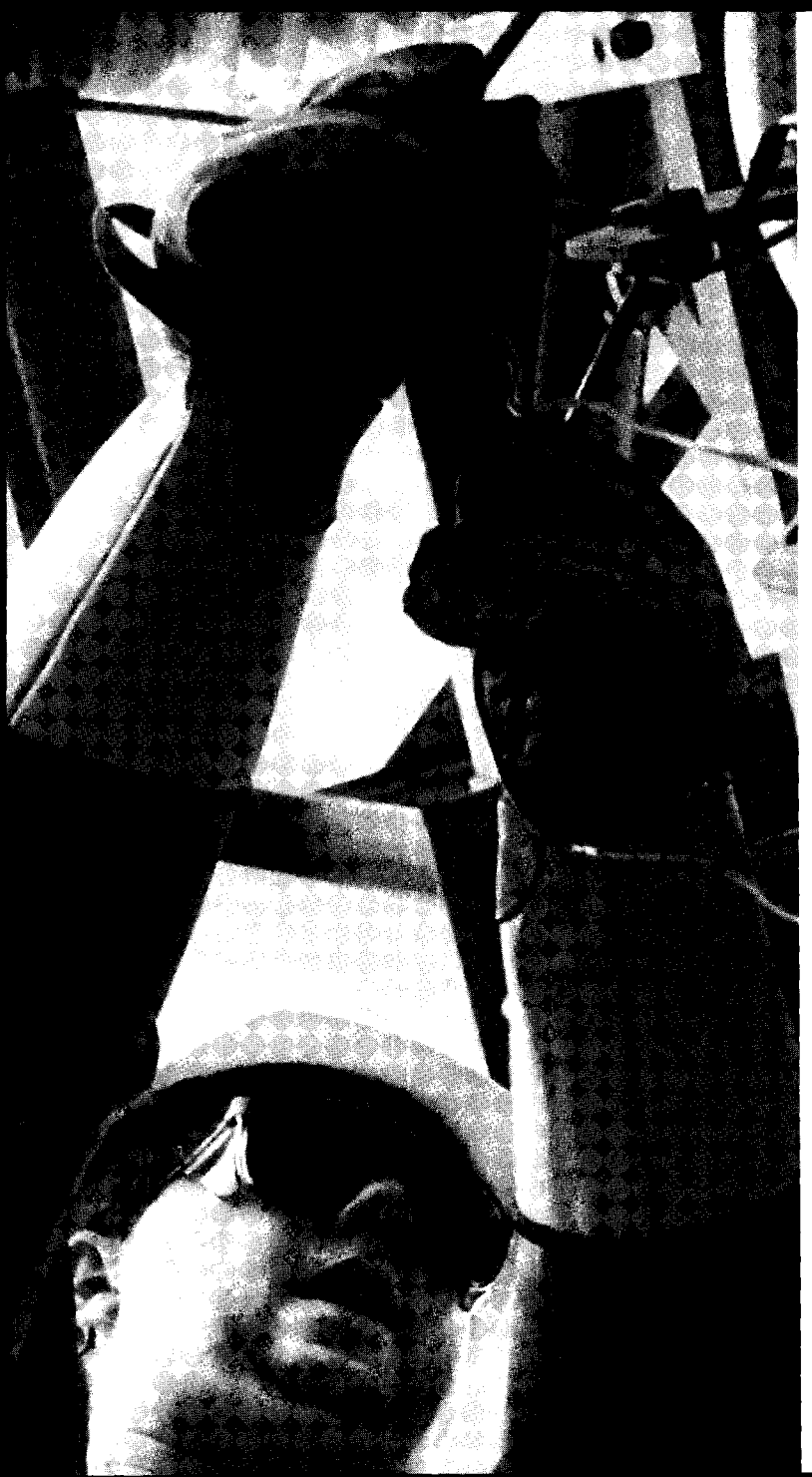

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War Not Peace

NOW PLAYING ON the West African coast: a final reminder of why Bill Clinton is not a great president. Yes, he's helped make America obscenely wealthy. And, no, his Monica tryst didn't damage the Constitution. But at his core he is a deal maker. His deepest faith is that every circle can be squared, every opponent persuaded, every conflict peace-processed, every difference split. And that means he only fails when it really matters: when he's facing an adversary who represents genuine evil.

First Bosnia, then Rwanda, now Sierra Leone. Last week, in a move straight out of Slobodan Milosevic's playbook, troops loyal to Sierra Leonian rebel leader Foday Sankoh took 500 U.N. peacekeepers hostage. The "world community" was deeply embarrassed. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan leveled threats, but even the remotest of thugs knows that such threats mean nothing. Liberals in Congress belatedly introduced legislation to send $20 million to the woefully ineffective programs to demilitarize the country. The U.N. appealed to Washington to send peacekeeping troops too, but the appeal was barely dignified with a response.

But this pathetic drama misses the larger question: Why does Sierra Leone have a peacekeeping force to begin with? The country boasts a democratic government headed by a man—Ahmad Tejan Kabbah—who in 1996 won a free and fair election. Facing him is Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front, a guerrilla movement that stalks the countryside conscripting ten-year-olds and hacking off limbs. To even call the RUF a political force is to dignify it beyond what it deserves. It embodies no popular aspiration, and it articulates no competing vision of society—save a thirst for money and power and a willingness to spill oceans of innocent blood to satisfy it.

In February 1998, following a coup carried out by the RUF in tandem with elements in the military, Nigeria restored Kabbah to power. And for the next year the Nigerians battled the rebels. Then, in January 1999, claiming a lack of funds, Lagos said it was pulling out.

The Nigerian threat presented Clinton with a stark choice: Help win the war or help build a peace. Winning the war would not have been easy. The only realistic vehicle for doing so was the Nigerians, an unruly occupying force with its own record of human rights violations and an inability to defeat the RUF in the countryside. But the Kabbah government had Sankoh in custody; he was scheduled to be executed. And Lagos itself was moving from dictatorship to democracy. A serious Western commitment of money and training could have made Nigeria's troops more responsible and more effective. And, faced with a real military assault, the RUF, many of whose "soldiers" are just children, might have crumbled. Yet no such commitment was made; the United States refused all of Nigeria's requests for support.

Instead, Clinton phoned Sankoh and persuaded him to enter a "peace accord." Sankoh, a war criminal if ever there was one, was not only freed, he was offered a potential place in Sierra Leone's government. The Clintonites sweetly told Sankoh, a man whose troops routinely cut off the hands of Sierra Leonians so they would never be able to vote again, that he could run for president. In return, the RUF would disarm under the supervision of U.N. peacekeepers.

It was classic Clintonism: splitting the difference where there was no moral equivalence and demanding a "peace process" when the real issue was justice. And it was easy to do, because in Africa, even more than in the Balkans, the insidious paradigm of "primordial ethnic hatreds" eviscerates moral distinctions. Clinton should have done to Sankoh what he refused for five years to do to Milosevic: Call him evil and make recognition of that evil the basis of U.S. policy. But that is not Clinton's style, and the Republicans in Congress certainly weren't going to object. They barely acknowledge that Africa exists, let alone that it is the site of moral struggles worthy of American action.

So now the Nigerians are mostly gone, and the RUF has taken hostage the peacekeepers who were supposedly disarming the group. Some in the United Nations are calling for the peacekeeping force to be beefed up. But a better peacekeeping force would do no good, because, as the cliché goes, there's no peace to keep. What's more, the RUF doesn't deserve peace; it deserves war. In an ideal world, in which African lives mattered as much as European lives, the United States would prosecute that war, in part, itself—at least from the air. In the real world, the United States should tell the United Nations to leave Sierra Leone, ask the Nigerians to return (possibly under the rubric of the Economic Community of West African States, which Lagos effectively controls), and give them the money and weapons they need to win.

That's what a great president would do. We're not holding our breath. ■

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NOTEBOOK

BREAKING THE SILENCE: Back in January, when we first reported on the relationship between right-wing mogul Roger Milliken and Ralph Nader's Public Citizen ("Silent Partner," by Ryan Lizza, January 10), we knew the Naderites were sheepish about speaking on the subject. In particular, they were extremely reluctant to address rumors that Milliken was financing Public Citizen's anti-globalization efforts. Public Citizen's top trade lobbyist, Lori Wallach, who works closely with Milliken's top trade lobbyist, dodged our question about whether Milliken has given money to Public Citizen by telling us, via e-mail, that Public Citizen doesn't take any "corporate or government funds" and has never taken money from Milliken's company. When we followed up with an e-mail message asking whether Milliken *himself* has ever given any money to Public Citizen, Wallach never responded; she also refused our repeated requests for a phone interview. When we finally got her deputy Mike Dolan on the phone, he was forced to end the interview immediately when Wallach found out whom he was talking to. In the end, Public Citizen and its sister organization, Citizens Trade Campaign, would neither confirm nor deny a financial relationship with Milliken. But all this stonewalling seems relatively quaint compared to the—well, how should we say this?—disinformation campaign Wallach has waged since the publication of the article. After reading our article, a radical trade activist who calls himself Mark S., upset that his allies on the left might be taking money from Milliken, asked Wallach about Public Citizen's relationship with the billionaire. Instead of explaining it, Wallach attacked our article. "[T]he answers to your questions," wrote Wallach, in an e-mail message to Mark S. that is now posted on his website and was recently brought to our attention, "were given—both verbally and in writing—to the New Republic person who wrote that goofy article—BEFORE he wrote it when he was interviewing us." On the contrary, while we were reporting the story no one from Public Citizen or Citizens Trade Campaign ever provided us with anything, either "verbally" or "in writing," that explained their connection to Milliken, other than the neither-confirm-nor-deny statement, Dolan's truncated phone conversation, and Wallach's dodgy e-mail. Despite the fact that Wallach wouldn't talk to TNR for the story, she told Mark S., "I speak to reporters from neoliberal rags like *New Republic*." Worst of all, Wallach told Mark S. that our article had factual mistakes: "Indeed, several other people quoted in the piece have forwarded me their letters to NR stating that they were quoted saying things they had never said." That statement is patently false—at least as far as TNR goes. We have not received a single complaint from anyone suggesting they were misquoted in the article. As for whether Wallach has these letters, we asked for them, but, as we went to press, she had yet to produce any. Alas, Wallach's e-mail message to Mark S. wasn't an isolated incident. After Chris Nelson, a trade lobbyist who writes a daily trade newsletter, penned an item on Public Citizen and Milliken that cited our story, Wallach wrote him an e-mail dismissing our "high-school journalism quality attempted hatchet job." Wallach alleged to Nelson that Public Citizen had provided TNR with "not only . . . lists of our funding sources but a written answer to his [Lizza's] inquiry about Milliken—i.e. that we DO NOT take money from Milliken or for that matter any corporate or government funds." Again, hogwash. The lists of funding sources Wallach was presumably referring to were publicly available 990 tax forms, which reveal the amount of contributions to the group but not the specific sources of the money. The written response Wallach was apparently touting was her nonresponsive e-mail. And these are just the slings and arrows from Wallach that we know about; there's no telling how many other people she has peddled this nonsense to. For all her complaints, Wallach has yet to write to TNR about the Milliken article. The letter Public Citizen did send to this magazine—written by its president, Joan Claybrook—made no mention of Wallach's allegations. And still, to this day, neither Lori Wallach, Public Citizen, nor Citizens Trade Campaign has ever unequivocally denied a financial relationship between their organizations and Roger Milliken. Wallach, in an interview in the Spring 2000 issue of *Foreign Policy*, did say, "Roger Milliken does not fund Public Citizen." But, when we asked her whether Milliken funded or contributed to other Public Citizen-affiliated organizations—specifically Citizens Trade Campaign—Wallach refused to answer, saying that she'd already violated her organization's policy by talking about Milliken to *Foreign Policy*. Given Wallach's penchant for word games, her *Foreign Policy* answer hardly seems unequivocal. So much for the Naderites' vaunted commitment to openness and integrity in public affairs.

TRAIL FEVER:

His Campaign Break

Giuliani scales back as he evaluates cancer treatment

—*Newsday*, April 29

VOICING OPTIMISM, GIULIANI RETURNS TO CAMPAIGN TRAIL

—*The New York Times*, same day

(Thanks to Elie Schwartz of Baldwin, New York)

A DOSE OF THEIR OWN MEDICINE: The protest spirit is alive and well in New York City. When, after last Saturday's Millennium Marijuana March, more than 300 hipsters—many of them white teenagers from the Long Island and New Jersey suburbs—were arrested for lighting up in public and sent to detox in jail, they bristled with righteous indignation more appropriate to a Soweto freedom rally.

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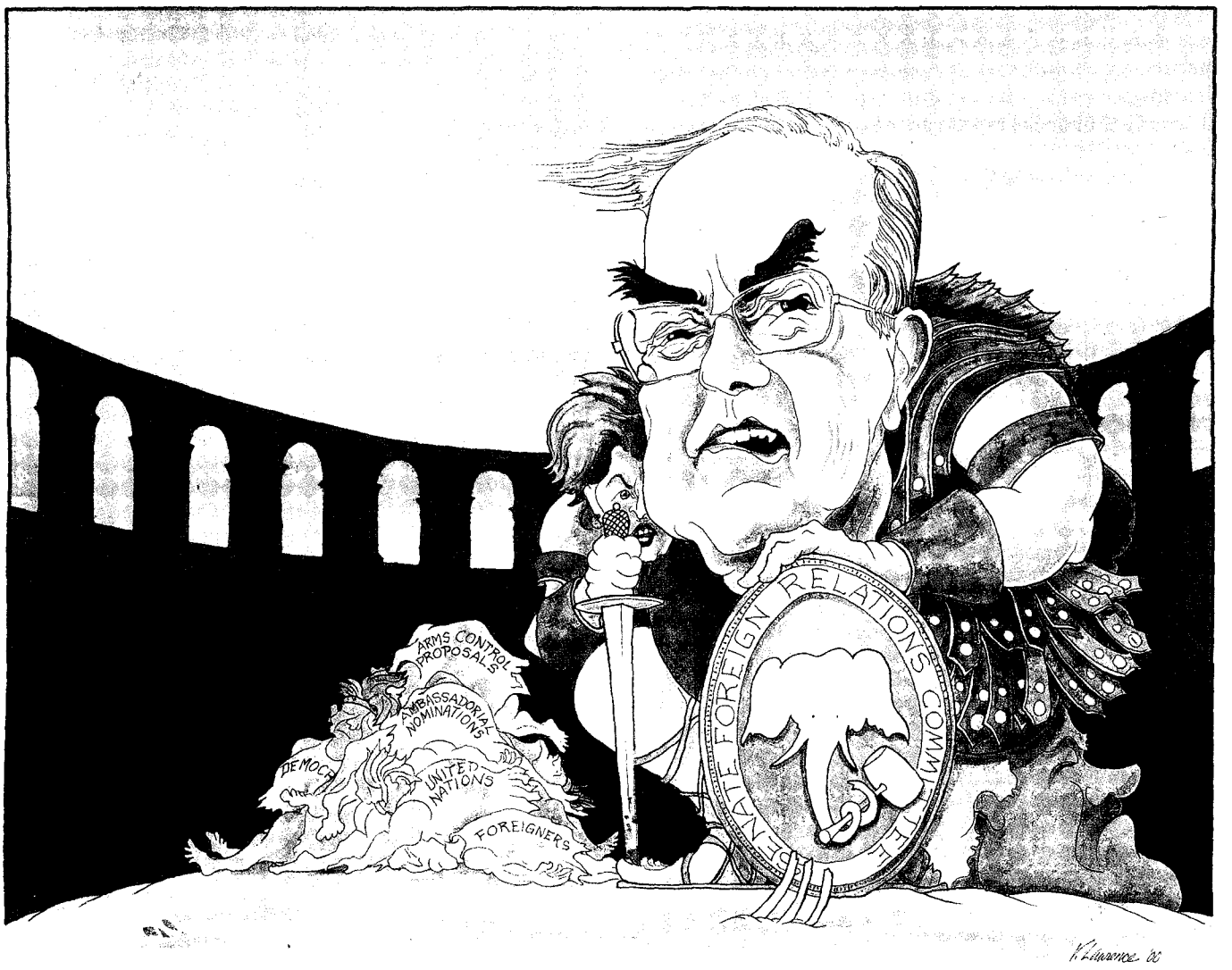
One marcher called home in tears to complain about the lousy jail cuisine; another whined to *The New York Times* about the prison tea, served—gasp—without sugar. Yet another complained that the police "were rude." And parents carped that they had to wait overnight until their children were released, branding Mayor Rudy Giuliani a "tyrant." "Let's put his kid in jail and see how he feels," fumed one Jersey Shore dad. "If I lived in New York, I'd vote against him." Of course, the irony, as Jeffrey Rosen pointed out recently in these pages ("Excessive Force," April 10), is that, during Giuliani's zero-tolerance regime, minorities have been locked up for the same minor offenses (and have often suffered greater indignities than sugarless tea). About their plight the folks from Teaneck and Manhasset have been notably silent. In fact, it was Giuliani's efforts to restore to the city a reputation for public safety that allowed suburban moms and dads to feel comfortable sending their kids there on weekends. Zero tolerance sure loses its sheen when you're the one sitting in jail.

LESS-SUCCESSFUL VERSIONS OF THE "I LOVE YOU" COMPUTER BUG

—The "Let's just be friends" bug
—The "New digital pix of my colonoscopy!" bug
—The "An important message from Bill Bradley" bug
—The "XXX Naughty Sam Donaldson XXX" bug
—The "Lamar! in 2004!" bug

IN ROTATION: With William Saletan's column this week, we initiate a new TRB rotation. TRB will be written by Saletan, Jodie Allen, Paul Berman, and Andrew Sullivan. Saletan is a senior writer at *Slate.com* and is completing a book on the politics of abortion. Allen, a former *Washington Post* editor and writer, is now a senior writer at *U.S. News & World Report*, covering the political economy. Berman, author of *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*, is a freelance critic and journalist who's a longtime contributor to our back of the book. And Sullivan is a TNR senior editor. ■

VINT'S WEEK



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Cardinal O'Connor, 1920–2000.

Not Just Love

By NAT HENTOFF

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR called himself, with a smile, "the Genghis Khan of the church." His insistent, often combative preaching of church doctrine, particularly church doctrine on abortion, did not endear him to New York liberals, who invariably referred to him as a "hard-liner." Indeed, Gloria Steinem once declared that the two worst things that had happened to the city in recent years were AIDS and Cardinal O'Connor.

But O'Connor, who died last week at the age of 80, vigorously contradicted Steinem's appraisal. I knew him first as a reporter, then as a friend. One night in 1986, while working on a profile of the cardinal for *The New Yorker*, I accompanied him to a private dinner at a university club in New York. There, a cadre of conservatives and neoconservatives, including at least one heavy contributor to Catholic charities, waited to grill O'Connor. Like every other Catholic bishop in the country, he had signed a pastoral letter on the economy that declared bluntly: "We say it is a social and moral scandal that one of every seven Americans is poor. Eighty-six percent of [total net financial assets] are held by the top ten percent of all families."

The dinner had barely started when the indictment began. "What business is it of the church," asked one conservative, "to get involved with the minimum wage, maximum employment, and such secular matters? This is a socialist document."

Calmly, the cardinal answered: "I am a priest. About 900,000 individuals in New York City live in substandard conditions, including overcrowding, with all the attendant evils of that kind of life. I would be failing, as a priest, if all I did was to say Mass and carry out the customary religious duties of my office."

He said it again and again. O'Connor's episcopal motto during his years in New York was "There can be no love without justice." During a Christmas homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1968, he said, "There's no point in simply talking to people about filling their souls if you don't fill their bellies."

One of the cardinal's more passionate causes—omitted by Steinem and other decriers of his influence—was the rights of labor. During a hospital workers' strike, a consortium of hospitals, including Catholic hospitals, brought in strikebreakers. In a corridor outside his office in the Catholic Center, I heard O'Connor roaring, "Over my dead body will any person be fired because he or she belongs to a union and is exercising the right of collective bargaining." Not long after, he held a press conference together with Jesse Jackson, urging that attention be given to the scandalous wages being paid home health care workers.

Always accessible to the press, O'Connor enjoyed his role as a public citizen, and he knew his forensic skills were sharp enough to discomfort his critics. "Why," he asked at a Harvard Law School forum, "would we bishops not be imposing our morality on others when we oppose rape, but impose our morality on others when we oppose abortion?"

There were times when he worried, as he told me, that if he were more circumspect he might be a more effective teacher of the truths of the church. "But I can't go against my temperament," he added. "That would be acting."

THAT SENTIMENT ANIMATED his entire being. Unlike many visible public figures, the cardinal did not resist—or equivocate in—confessing error. In 1968, for instance, after serving in Vietnam as a Marine chaplain and receiving the Legion of Merit, he wrote a book, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*, that could have been written by Robert McNamara. He echoed the moral and national-security rationales for American involvement; the alternative, he argued, would be "a Communist takeover." But in 1985, after his first year as archbishop of New York, he told me: "That's a bad book, you know, I regret having published it. I wasn't aware that so many of the decisions leading to the enormous cost in lives and resources on both sides were taken for political rather than military reasons."

O'Connor found it very difficult not to be honest with himself, even about church doctrine. Late one afternoon in 1986, with two priests listening attentively, I told him I had received a newsletter from the Chicago-based National Coalition of American Nuns asking again why women could not be priests. "We women of the Catholic community," the newsletter read, "do not seek jurisdiction over the male-church power estate. In asking for ordination, we seek only to preach, to administer the sacraments and to teach the Gospel to the poor."

O'Connor had a bad cold, was tired, and was due to speak at Columbia University in a few hours. One of the priests suggested firmly that the interview was over. The cardinal waved him away. "How can I answer that and be quite honest?" he said hoarsely. Then he spoke of the theological tradition and of history: the twelve apostles were men; Catholics speak of "God the Father" and "God the Son"; Christ always spoke of himself as "the Son."

"The pope," O'Connor continued, "is pretty well bound by theological tradition, but is he bound in the same way as he is by infallible, divinely revealed teaching?" The two priests leaned forward. "By definition he is not," O'Connor said softly. "Could he pronounce differently about the ordination of women if he was convinced that his new position was theologically sound? I'd have to say yes."

The priests seemed frozen in space. "It has never been infallibly declared," the cardinal went on, "that women cannot be ordained to the priesthood. It is conceivable that it could happen. But, I remind you," he said with sudden

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NAT HENTOFF's book *John Cardinal O'Connor: At the Storm Center of a Changing American Catholic Church* was published by Scribner in 1988.

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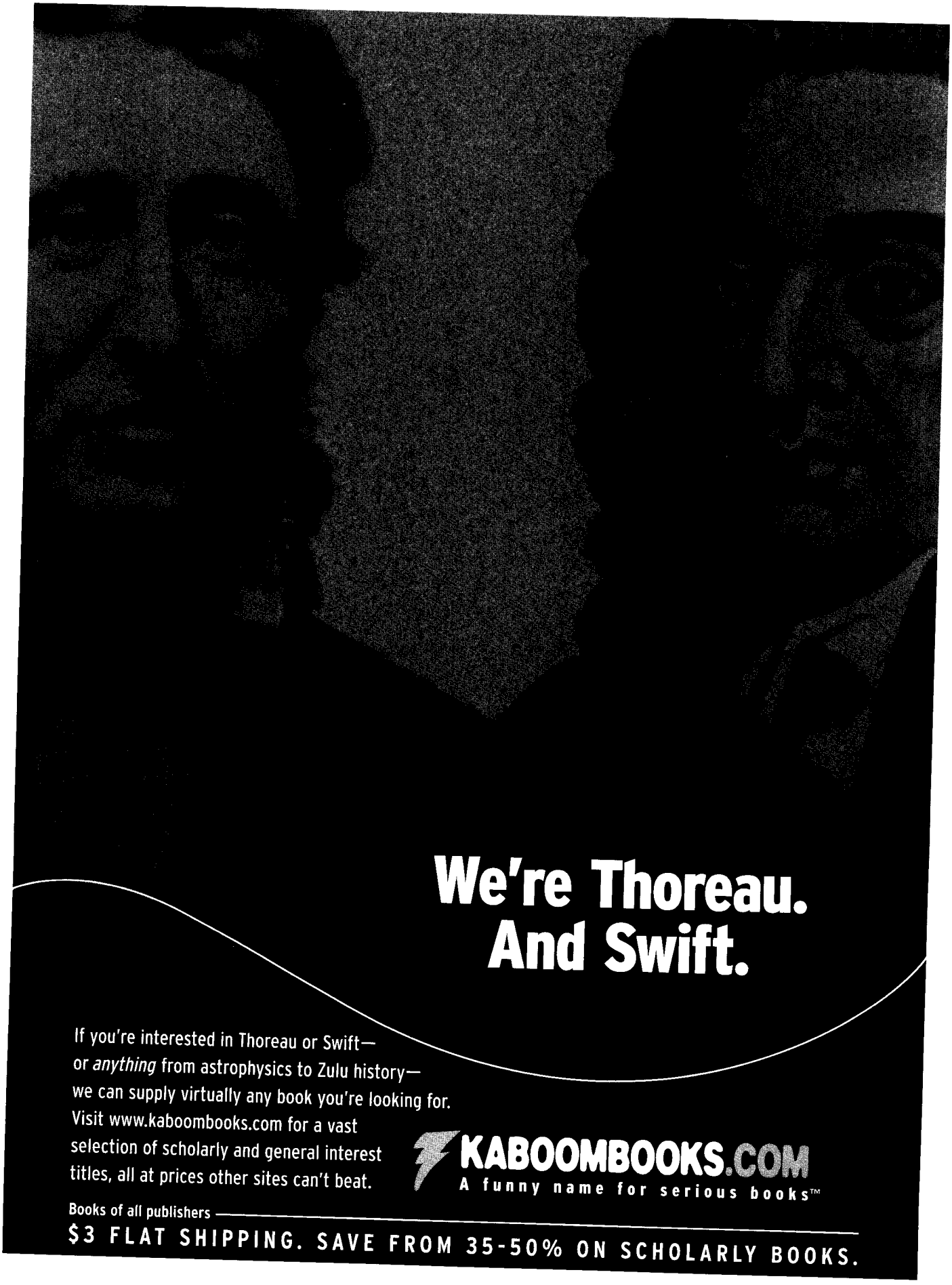
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vigor, "not in the lifetime of this pope."

We had a serious disagreement once. In 1987, the cardinal defended the pope's decision to receive Kurt Waldheim, then Austria's leader, at the Vatican. Waldheim had been accused of war crimes as a former Nazi *Oberleutnant* and as an aid to Wehrmacht General Alexander Lohr (who was later executed as a war criminal). The pope was the first head of state to meet Waldheim. I wrote a column in *The Village Voice* bitterly attacking the pope and the cardinal, who publicly justified his visit. In return, O'Connor sent an angry letter expressing his acute disappointment in my rush to judgment.

As I was preparing an even stronger second letter to His Eminence, a note arrived from him: "You may recall how Belloc ends his *Path to Rome*: So let us love one another and laugh. Time passes and we shall soon laugh no longer. Meanwhile, earnest men are at siege upon us all around. So let us laugh and suffer absurdities, for that is only to suffer one another."

For this Jewish atheist, this cardinal was a mensch. ■

Brittany Dispatch

Provincialism

By JON HENLEY

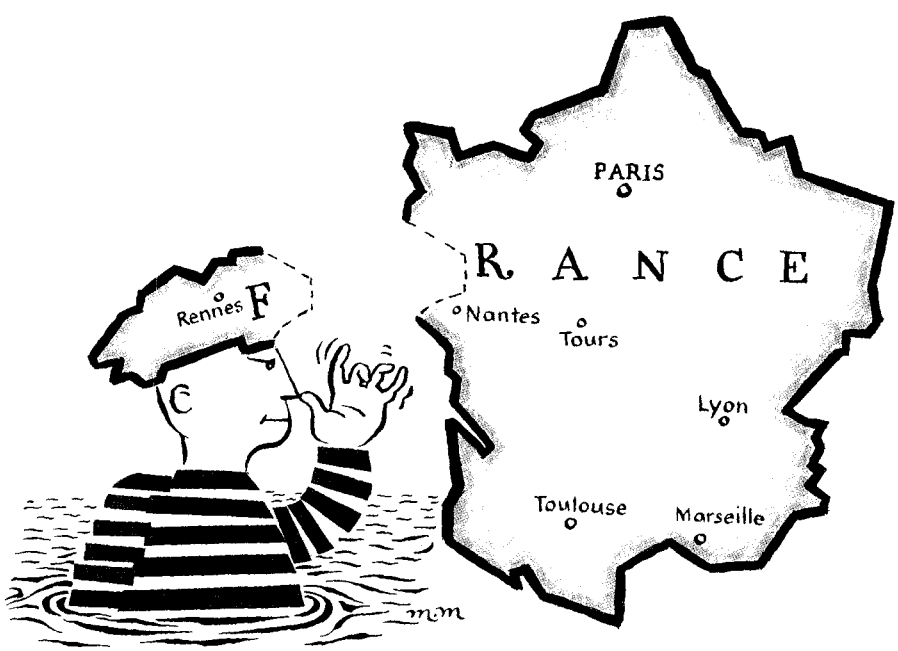
NICE PLACE, BRITTANY. A glorious chunk of wild and windswept countryside, it has pretty white-walled, slate-roofed villages, picture-postcard beaches, mouthwatering crepes—and a liberation front.

In twenty-first-century Western Europe this is, of course, absurd. Oppressed people in many parts of the world would give their eyeteeth to be part of precisely what the Breton Liberation Front (and its armed wing, known by its French acronym, ARB) wants out of, which is a cruel, repressive, and anti-democratic state called, er, France. But there's no accounting for taste, and the fact is that a small number of Bretons have been fighting for full independence ever since an unfortunate ruler of Brittany, François I, signed the Indissoluble Act of Union with the Crown of France in 1524. After that, to be fair, France was not always overly kind to Brittany. The region lost what was left of its administrative autonomy in the 1789 revolution, and the centralizing Napoleonic drive for uniformity all but crushed Breton customs and culture. Above all, the Breton language, an ancient Celtic tongue related to Welsh and Cornish whose earliest surviving text—a treatise on medicine—dates to the eighth century, was effectively outlawed. One hundred years ago, schoolteachers in Brittany beat any pupil caught speaking Breton.

But today things have completely changed. Breton culture is blossoming. Near extinction 50 years ago, the Breton language is now spoken daily by some 200,000 people and taught in special, newly founded bilingual schools to some 5,600 children a year. Where once an overenthusiastic demonstration of Breton nationalism earned a prison sentence, these days hardly a town hall in the region neglects to fly its Gwen ha Du, the black-and-white Breton flag, alongside the French *tricolore*. Celtic music festivals, or *festou-noz*, outcompete discos and nightclubs. And the launch of TV-Breizh, a Breton-language TV station, is planned for August. The station is partly funded by a media magnate, Patrick Le Lay, who, like several other successful French businessmen, proudly proclaims his Breton origins.

ALL OF WHICH makes the death of Laurence Turbec so absurdly tragic. The pretty, blonde 28-year-old was an employee at a McDonald's in Quevert, a small Breton town not far from the picturesque resort of Dinan. At ten o'clock in the morning on April 19, she opened the number-one serving window at the back of the drive-through and a bomb blew up in her face. No one seems clear why the Breton separatists—who have previously attacked only empty state buildings—chose McDonald's. The fast-food chain itself, a target of various ransackings by French farmers last summer, was mystified. In a moving newspaper ad, it commiserated with the family of its dead employee and stated simply, "Enough is enough."

Until last month's murder, the ARB seemed merely silly. It has at most 15 active members. One of its alleged leaders was born in Toulouse, several hundred miles to Brittany's south.



MATTHEW MARTIN

JON HENLEY is Paris correspondent for *The Guardian*.

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Just Say Not Guilty?

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And, although it has now carried out some 250 attacks since the 1960s—including, in recent years, attacks on government buildings in Belfort, where the French interior minister is mayor, and Cintegabelle, the prime minister's political base—it had, until last month, killed only two people. And the two killed were ARB militants blown up trying to defuse their own bombs because they were afraid passersby might get hurt when the makeshift devices exploded.

But the ARB's strategy changed radically last September, when it stole eight tons of explosives from a quarry company's warehouse in the Breton town of Plevin. Not long afterward, the group issued a statement declaring: "The ARB need not limit its actions to the symbolic. When the French constitution recognizes the existence of the Breton people, the integrity of our territory, the Breton language, conditions for real democratic debate will be in place. Armed struggle seems to us to be the best means to obtain those conditions."

Then, on April 19, minutes before Turbec died, police defused another bomb outside the main post office in the regional capital, Rennes. The dynamite used to make both, police scientists later confirmed, came from the eight-ton cache of Titanite 30 stolen in September. Authorities have also determined that some of the dynamite has been used in a recent spate of bombings by the Basque separatist group ETA in Spain. Five tons of the explosives have been recovered, but three (enough for maybe 100 bomb attacks) are still at large.

And so it was that the absurd cause of Breton independence claimed its first innocent victim since World War II. Last week, in its first statement since the killing, the ARB expressed no regrets and said the group's fight would continue "until the state meets our principal demands." Nonetheless, the group protested that it was not responsible for the Quevert attack. The French police were unconvinced and arrested six alleged ARB members in connection with the bombing last week.

Almost without exception, Bretons were horrified by the attack. Nonviolent Breton movements like Emgann, which means "combat," deplored it, with several leading members announcing their resignation from the political struggle.

The irony behind all this is that the case for greater Breton autonomy, as opposed to Breton independence, is not crazy. The fact is that France has refused, for example, to ratify a European charter on regional languages—meaning that while Breton may be spoken, taught, read, and broadcast, no administrative or legal procedures may be carried out in any language other than French. Senior French politicians appear strangely terrified of official recognition for Breton. There is an almost visceral fear that, in the words of the interior minister, it would lead to a "Balkanization of France." The archconservative newspaper *Le Figaro* said formal autonomy would "dislocate the French identity."

This, say even moderate Bretons, is the response of a reactionary state still living in the Napoleonic era. They note that Scotland and Wales have recently gotten their own parliaments. But Brittany almost certainly will not follow in their path toward true autonomy. And the people most responsible are the same people who claim to want it the most: the killers of Laurence Turbec. ■

How much is that kidney in the window?

Price is Right

By BRUCE GOTTLIEB

EIGHT YEARS AGO, an article appeared in an obscure Israeli medical journal, *Medicine and Law*, arguing that American citizens should be permitted to sell their kidneys. This would require changing federal law, which since 1984 has made selling any organ, even one's own, a felony punishable by up to five years in jail. The author of the article was a Michigan pathologist named Jack Kevorkian.

Kevorkian's argument was that the current system of accepting kidneys only from dead patients and Good Samaritan donors provides too few kidneys. While this was true even then, the situation is worse today. As of April 30, there were 44,989 people on the waiting list for a kidney transplant. About 2,300 of them will die this year while waiting. If kidney sales were permitted, Kevorkian argued, these lives would almost certainly be saved.

He may be right. In recent years, economists and economically minded lawyers at the University of Chicago and Yale Law School have made similar arguments. The idea was endorsed two years ago in the pages of *The Lancet* by a group of prominent transplant surgeons from Harvard Medical School and hospitals in Canada and England. Of course, legalizing kidney sales remains a fringe view, both within the medical profession and outside it. But that needs to change—particularly since President Clinton and Congress have spent the last few months bickering over how best to allocate the nation's limited supply of transplant organs, with no quick resolution in sight.

There are several familiar arguments against legalizing kidney sales, beginning with the idea that giving up a kidney is too dangerous for the donor. But, popular though this argument is, the statistics don't bear it out—at least relative to other risks people are legally permitted to assume. In terms of effect on life expectancy, donating one of your two kidneys is more or less equivalent to driving an additional 16 miles to work each day. No one objects to the fact that ordinary jobs—like construction or driving a delivery van—carry roughly similar risks.

Another common objection is that government ought to encourage altruism, not profit seeking. But, from the perspective that matters—the recipient's—this distinction is irrelevant, so long as the donated kidney works. It's not as if the point of kidney transplants were to improve the donor's karma. Moreover, kidneys from cadavers function for eight years, on average, whereas those from live donors last 17 years. (The reason is that kidneys can be "harvested" from live donors in circumstances less hectic than death and

BRUCE GOTTLIEB is a student at Harvard Law School.

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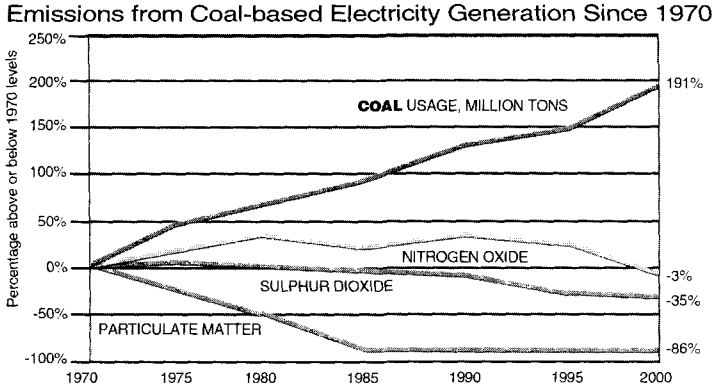
A STRONG ECONOMY.
AND THE POWER TO HAVE THEM BOTH.

Electricity's Environmental Record

Emissions from Coal-based Electricity Generation Since 1970



SOURCE: U.S. EPA and Energy Information Administration

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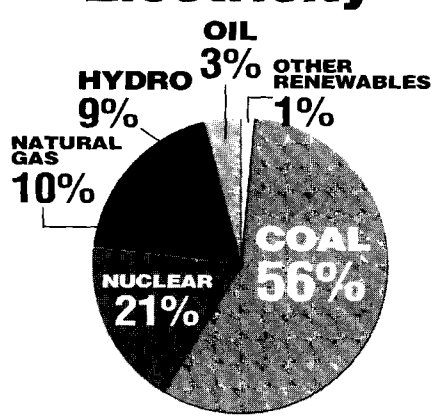

SOURCE: Energy Information Administration

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that donors and recipients can be better matched.)

This brings us to the most powerful objection to the sale of kidneys—that, in practice, it would result in the poor selling parts of their bodies to the rich. But, in today's health care economy, that probably wouldn't be the case. For several decades, Congress has mandated that Medicare pay the medical bills of any patient—of any age—who requires dialysis. Transplant surgery and postsurgical drug treatment are expensive, yes, but they're nothing compared to dialysis, which costs about $40,000 per year. That's a savings of $40,000 per year for the 17 years or so during which a transplanted kidney will function. In other words, insurers and the federal government would probably be happy to buy a kidney for anyone who needs one. They'd even be willing to pay donors considerable sums—$50,000, $100,000, or more. (Indeed, according to one estimate, if kidneys could be found for all the patients now on dialysis, Medicare would break even after just two years.)

At these prices, there would be no shortage of sellers. The government could enforce price floors to keep competitive sellers from bidding down the going rate for kidneys. And, given the amount of money involved, it seems downright contradictory to argue that the poor should be prevented from taking the deal on the grounds that poverty is unfair. The solution to poverty is anyone's guess, but restricting poor people's economic opportunities definitely isn't the answer. Nor is it enough to say that there are better and more humane ways of leveling the distribution of wealth than allowing kidney sales. To argue against kidney selling, one must provide a better *practical* way of helping the disadvantaged. It does a poor person who wishes to sell his kidney no favors to tell him instead to lobby Congress for an increase in the minimum wage or a more egalitarian tax code. Besides, the kidney waiting list contains a disproportionate share of minorities. Thirty-five percent of the people on the waiting list are black; twelve percent are Hispanic. If the point of the current law is to temper the effects of income inequality, asking racial minorities to shoulder an unequal share of the burden is surely a step in the wrong direction.

Sure, critics will say that allowing kidney sales is the beginning of a slippery slope toward selling other, more essential organs. This, of course, would be a moral disaster, since it would mean legalizing serious maiming (selling eyes) or even murder (selling hearts or lungs). But the very outrageousness of this outcome will keep it from happening. A slippery-slope argument is convincing only when it shows that the slipping would be either inevitable (for example, that legalizing abortion when a condom breaks means people would be less careful about birth control, thereby increasing abortions) or unconscious (outlawing child porn would lead to outlawing *Lolita*, since bureaucrats can't tell the difference). But it's easy for legislators to draft a law that clearly allows kidney selling but forbids other forms of organ selling. (Kidneys are fairly unique in that, while everybody has two, somebody with just one can lead an almost entirely normal life.) And it seems implausible that a member of Congress would mistake public approval of kidney sales for approval of economic transactions that leave sellers dead or partially blind.

Nicholas L. Tilney, a Harvard Medical School professor and transplant surgeon, wrote a paper in 1989 against kidney selling. He says this is still the view of "100 out of 100 transplant surgeons." But in 1998—as the kidney shortage became more acute—he coauthored, along with other surgeons, lawyers, and philosophers, the provocative *Lancet* paper that argued for legalizing kidney sales. "We debated this question for about two years before writing that piece," says Tilney. "All of us transplanters, and I'm sure the public, have this tremendous gut reaction against it. That was sort of our initial reaction. And then, when we all got around and really thought about this and talked about it, our thinking began to change."

The prospect of someone going under the knife to earn a down payment on a new house or to pay for college is far from pleasant. But neither is the reality of someone dying because a suitable kidney can't be found. The free market may be the worst way to allocate kidneys. The worst, that is, except for all the other alternatives. ■

Caucasus Dispatch

Domino

By MASHA GESSEN

THE GLITZ AND fanfare surrounding Vladimir Putin's May 7 inauguration led many to compare the event to a czar's coronation. A better analogy would be a shotgun wedding: everyone knew the real reason for the event but was too polite to name it. When the new president, in his brief and stiff speech, proclaimed, "We have one motherland and one people," everyone in Russia knew he was talking about Chechnya, the war that brought him to power and the consequences of which form the central challenge of his tenure.

When Boris Yeltsin tapped Putin as his successor last August, Putin proclaimed it his mission to restore glory to the military and order to the nation. He has accomplished the former by bombing away the humiliations of the past, along with most of the life in Chechnya. But achieving the first goal has come at the cost of the second, because, thanks

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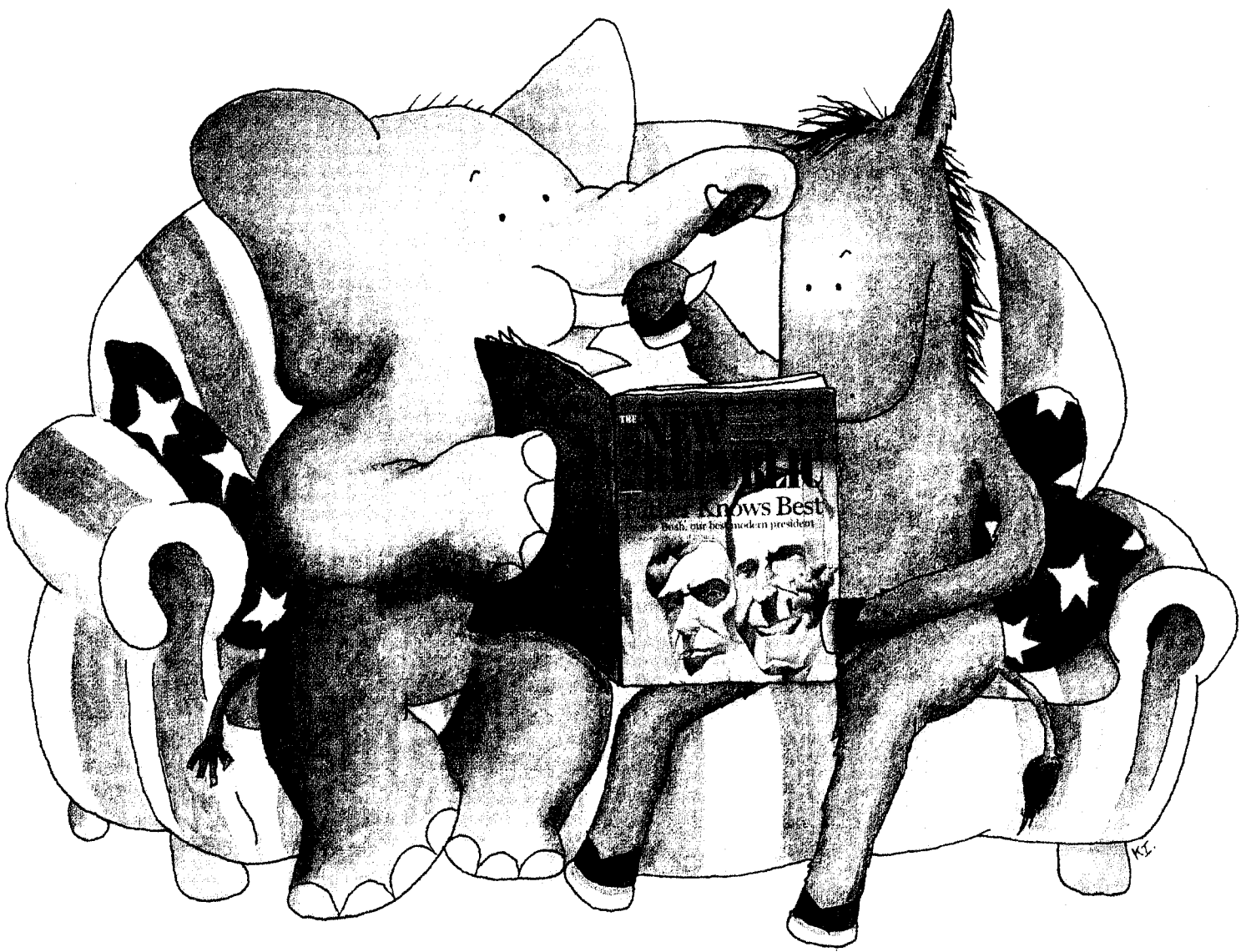

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largely to Putin's scorched-earth Chechnya policy, the entire North Caucasus region is now on the brink of exploding.

For starters, there's Chechnya itself. The Russian campaign to retake the regional capital of Grozny during the first Chechen war, from 1994 to 1996, left the city so decimated that a shocked member of a delegation from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe compared it to post-World War II Dresden. By the time the rebels took back the city, in August 1996, not a single building was left unscathed. I once spent the better part of a day there looking for a place to spend the night, in the vain hope of finding a house with both a roof and intact windows. Now, following Moscow's latest assault—which began with bombings in September and ended with house-to-house fighting in February—I doubt it's possible to find a structure in Grozny that even has four walls.

Grozny used to boast half a million residents. Today it must be the quietest city on earth. On my visits there—the most recent of which was last week—I found high-rise upon high-rise collapsed into piles of concrete. Monuments had been reduced to their pedestals. Advertising signs, pockmarked by shrapnel, served not to inform but to remind: INTERNET in a city with no electricity or phone lines; AUTOMOTIVE SPARE PARTS in a city with no cars; CAFÉ in a city with no food.

The temporary authorities, installed by the federal government on legally questionable grounds, announced that the city would be closed and a capital for Chechnya established elsewhere. But by early April it was clear that the military could not keep the civilians out of their ruined city. People bribed and tricked their way past checkpoints to get to what was left of their bombed, shelled, and looted homes. More than 200 Chechens, led by a woman and authorized by no one, started rebuilding the Grozny railroad station. Finally, in a show of utter helplessness, the federal authorities declared that Grozny would be rebuilt as the capital.

As people return—the current population estimate, issued by the Emergencies Ministry, is 100,000—the Russian soldiers who formally control the city grow increasingly fearful. Their precautions range from the naïve to the murderous. In what used to be one of the city's main squares, they have stretched chicken wire from one checkpoint to another, covering most of the perimeter of the square. Soldiers try not to venture past the fence. On April 6, though, I saw a military truck drive out of the square onto one of the side streets and start firing, unprovoked, into the basement of a residential building. Ask Grozny's residents, and they'll say this is normal: Russian soldiers fire at anything that seems to move.

Helping the Russians are, theoretically, a temporary Chechen administration and a temporary Chechen police force. Opposition leaders have returned from three years' exile in Moscow to assume positions vacated by politicians whom the war turned into guerrilla fighters. But the new administrators have even less control over their heavily armed people than did their predecessors, under whom kidnappers, robbers, and bandits thrived. And, if the administrators are at least fairly loyal to Moscow, the same cannot be said of the police. "Half of them have just come down from the mountains and shaved off their beards," says an interior ministry colonel who administers one of Grozny's districts—meaning that yesterday these cops were guerrillas. His 160 men work with 86 new Chechen police. "We try to do background checks, of course, but what's the point when we don't even have the ability to communicate with the city's other districts to find out if they've checked these guys out?" In other words, all a Chechen rebel needs to do to secure a Russian-issued gun and uniform is move a few blocks from his home.

Outside Grozny, federal influence is even weaker. The mountains, where a scorched-earth policy is far more difficult to implement, are outside Russian control altogether. Even the city of Gudermes, largely spared thanks to town elders who negotiated the rebels' retreat before Moscow started bombing, is not fully secure. Just last week the temporary federal-administration office was shelled; heavy fighting breaks out almost every night.

The disorder is hardly limited to Chechnya. The population of neighboring Ingushetia has nearly doubled, thanks to almost 300,000 displaced Chechens who have been there as long as eight months. Moscow has tried both carrot and stick to convince the refugees to return to "liberated" Chechnya: it has organized transport home and stopped food supplies to refugee camps. But, when they discover that they have no home to return to or that their native towns are still being bombed or shelled, many come back to the camps. Others arrive from areas of new combat, so the few who do leave the camps are quickly replaced.

In response, Ingush authorities are playing a double game, complaining loudly about the unbearable burden refugees place on the republic while simultaneously refusing to cooperate with the federal authorities' attempts to manipulate the refugees into returning to Chechnya. The reason is that the Ingush and the Chechens are closely related. They speak more or less the same language, they endured the same Soviet atrocities—in 1944 Stalin deported members of both groups to Siberian Kazakhstan—and, until nine years ago, they formed a single republic. Although that republic split in

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two when Chechnya decided to break with Russia in 1991, the administrative border between Chechnya and Ingushetia was never clearly demarcated, and the two peoples continue to feel strong sympathy for each other.

Until now, Ingushetia's president, retired General Ruslan Aushev, has masterfully managed his people's dual loyalties. When refugees from the first Chechen war strained the Ingush economy, he welcomed them—and offset the ill effects by securing from Moscow free-trade-zone status for his republic. But he has no more such tricks this time, and there are more refugees now, who are likely to stay far longer. Signs that the Chechens have overstayed their welcome are everywhere. Police have been placed on emergency duty to address outbreaks of violence between refugees and locals. And tensions, once they have escalated, are almost impossible to defuse.

The instability in Ingushetia is particularly flammable given the republic's hostile relationship with its neighbor to the west, the Christian and traditionally pro-Moscow region of North Ossetia. The Ossetian border is hotly disputed. Indeed, in 1991–1992 the Ingush and the North Ossetians went to war over a tiny region that belonged to the Chechen-Ingush Republic before Stalin's 1944 deportation but was later handed over to North Ossetia. Thousands of refugees from the war remain in Ingushetia, unable to return home because the conflict was put down but never resolved. Peacekeeping troops and good sense have so far kept the Ingush and the Ossetians apart. (It is still impossible, for example, to convince a taxi from an Ingush town to drive you to an Ossetian town a dozen miles away, because cars with Ingush plates are certain to be stoned or shot at in Ossetia, and vice versa.) But, with Ingushetia bursting at the seams, the Ossetian-Ingush conflict is all but certain to flare up again.

Like North Ossetia, other pro-Russian parts of the North Caucasus have also been destabilized by their proximity to breakaway Muslims. Here everyone has to pick sides. For example, the Adygei Republic, located to Chechnya's west, whose minority Muslim population controls the local government, seems to be siding with the Chechens: its constitution is remarkably similar to Chechnya's, and an Islamic militant organization believed to be aiding the rebels has its offices here.

Multiethnic but primarily Muslim Dagestan has a more complex position: A Chechen incursion in August mobilized Dagestanis to the Russian side, but the brutality with which the federal military drove the Chechens out left locals bitter. Perhaps fearing an uprising, federal authorities have sealed off the regions where the fighting took place.

Yet another explosion may be brewing in Karachayevo-Cherkessia. Ethnic Russians make up nearly half its population, but the region's two other ethnic groups, the Karachai and the Cherkess, have been on the verge of war since a Karachai won the republic's first gubernatorial election last year. Mass Cherkess rallies filled the capital's central square last year, and, now that Cherkess efforts to overturn the vote seem doomed to fail, those combustible demonstrations are set to resume. Inflaming the situation further, Chechen rebels have long been believed to maintain outposts in the republic—and in mid-April federal law enforcement authorities said they had arrested several Karachayevo-Cherkessia residents implicated in last fall's building explosions in Moscow.

Chechnya's bigger neighbors—North Ossetia, the Stavropol and Krasnodar territories, and the Rostov region—have also been radicalized by the war. But in their case the

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effect has been to make them zealously, even militantly, pro-Russian, thus increasing the chances of prolonged conflict with Chechens and other Muslim groups.

In most of Russia, people support the Chechen war because they know too little about it; here people support it because they know too much. The federal military bases from which the Chechen war is conducted are located in North Ossetia and Rostov. Rostov is also home to the biggest military hospital in the region. As a result, the locals in these parts grasp the true casualty numbers better than most Russians. "You journalists never tell the truth," an airport cabbie told me. "A plane full of wounded soldiers lands here, and the same day you report there were two wounded today."

One in ten soldiers serving in Chechnya come from Rostov, but sending their children off to die produces in the locals a hatred not of Moscow but of their Muslim neighbors. Just about everyone I met, from a hotel clerk to two deputy governors, complained about Chechens and other dark "Caucasians"—a derogatory term, even here in the Caucasus—taking over the region. The threat is imagined—there are no more than 10,000 ethnic Chechens in the area, according to local authorities—but the response is real, and dangerous. Rostov's local governments have instituted strict, unconstitutional residence-permit systems to keep the Chechens out. And the war has strengthened Cossack groups that preach ethnic hatred. Most schools in the region have uniformed Cossacks guarding against the perceived Caucasian menace. Throughout the region, Cossacks patrol alongside police, checking documents and detaining ethnic outsiders.

Rostov's actual police are just as paranoid. They have been working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, since mid-September, when terrorists blew up a building in the region. In the following three months, there were 455 bomb threats—and each time the police sent out officers and dogs, often evacuating residents. So far all 455 have proved false, and all connections to Chechnya have proved imaginary. But that hasn't stopped the police from conducting endless "anti-terrorist measures": mass document checks and detention of anyone swarthy. Meanwhile, admits the region's deputy head of interior affairs, Viktor Burakov, "we leave the [real] criminals unattended." As a result, the number of unsolved violent crimes is on the rise.

This, believes Burakov, reflects a trend throughout the country: Some of the police are away in Chechnya, while the rest are fighting terrorism. Meanwhile, the number of rapes and murders grows. In short, Vladimir Putin's grand plan to bring order to his country has not just made Chechnya more deadly, and it is not just leading to civil war throughout the Caucasus—it is also bringing new violence to Russia itself. A shotgun wedding indeed. ■

Our greatest modern president.

Father Superior

By JONATHAN RAUCH

IN EARLY 1998, if you had rummaged through the questions that pollsters tuck in, almost as afterthoughts, at the end of their surveys, you might have noticed something peculiar. Gallup asked people whether they approved or disapproved of the job performance of five past presidents: John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. Kennedy, unsurprisingly, enjoyed the highest approval rating. But just behind him, right after Camelot, came—no, not Reagan—Bush. It wasn't a fluke. Again in 1999 and 2000, Bush scored number two, and these polls included every past president since JFK. More recently, of course, the people found another way to express their appreciation: they gave Bush's son the Republican presidential nomination.

This seems odd. Was Bush not the comma between two exclamation points, the amiable but underwhelming preppy whose one real success was the Gulf war and who even botched the aftermath of that? In Washington, conservatives detested Bush for raising taxes and losing the White House. Liberals dismissed him as Reagan Lite. Intellectuals ridiculed his sentence fragments and jumbled syntax. Activists scorned his caution ("Wouldn't be prudent!"). Political professionals despaired of his clumsiness. Journalists and editorial writers, not least at this magazine, found him mostly pathetic. Pretty much everyone regards Bush as a mediocrity, a footnote, an interlude between main events. Everyone, that is, except for the American public.

And the public is right; the contempt that intellectuals and activists feel for Bush reflects poorly on them, not him. In the standard post-JFK view, a president is meant to say and do great and mighty things: inspire the young to public service, realign politics, adopt big new programs (or, if you're a conservative, abolish big old ones). Bush is an object lesson in why that view of the presidency is wrong. And understanding why it's wrong sheds light on Reagan, on Bill Clinton, and, not least, on the peculiar predicament of Bush's eldest son.

Think back to January 1989. Reagan is leaving office. His record looks patchy at best. The Soviet Union is not only intact but fearsome; the Berlin Wall is still standing. In

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Nicaragua, the Sandinistas' Communist government remains firmly in charge. Reagan's spectacular military buildup has already given way to an almost equally spectacular build-down. The American military, having conquered Grenada and fled Lebanon, is still known more for its bloat than for its bite. The economy is expanding, inflation is down, tax reform has been enacted—all formidable accomplishments. But these accomplishments are imperiled. The economy is burdened by an alarming and rapidly rising public debt, which siphons off investment capital. Reagan has failed in his rather cursory attempt to scale back domestic spending. His astonishing deficits still rage uncontrolled. Much of his 1981 tax cut has already been taken back through tax hikes. In the savings-and-loan meltdown, the country faces the most alarming banking crisis since the Great Depression.

At this moment, the dorky Bush unpromisingly takes the helm. And he proceeds to do something Reagan rarely did: He takes responsibility.

He loses no time, for example, taking in hand the malodorous savings and loans. That a bad S&L situation was becoming a disaster was increasingly obvious as Reagan's second term wore on. Hopelessly insolvent S&Ls were gambling their depositors' savings on real estate and other dubious investments in a desperate bid to recoup deposits they had already lost in earlier dubious investments. Because the deposits were federally insured, it was really the taxpayers' money the thrifts were losing. If Reagan and Congress had acted promptly when the problem surfaced in the mid-'80s, the hemorrhaging could have been stopped at about $15 billion. But Congress dragged its feet, and Reagan, who knew a political loser when he saw one, was of no mind to force the issue. By 1988, the cost of liquidating the thrifts and paying off their depositors was growing by millions per day: $23 billion in early summer, $31 billion in July, $50 billion in October, $69 billion in November.

Within a month of assuming office, Bush proposed a rescue plan optimistically priced at $50 billion. He made its passage a priority, and in August the rescue became law. Now the whole nightmare is largely forgotten, a couple of paragraphs in finance texts—a fact that itself testifies to the rescue's success. Perhaps Bush deserves no special credit for merely doing what Reagan should have done much earlier. The point, however, is that he did it. Had Bush not put on his boots, waded into the sewage, and shoveled muck, the economy could not have subsequently expanded as it did.

In much the same way, Bush put to rest eight years of bitter and mostly counterproductive conflict over Nicaragua. Reagan was obsessed with the Sandinista regime and was determined to remove it. The Democratic Congress was equally determined to deny military aid to the anti-Sandinista Contras. The result was the Iran-Contra scandal and a policy whose wheels spun ever deeper into mud. Bush, apparently without a moment's hesitation, simply repudiated his predecessor's policy and embraced a regional peace deal that required the Contras to muzzle their guns if the Sandinistas acceded to elections.

Today it is hard to remember, or even believe, the bitterness that attended the Nicaragua question in Washington. James A. Baker, Bush's secretary of state, writes in his memoirs that his 22 days of shuttle diplomacy on Capitol Hill on the issue were "just as arduous and delicate an exercise as anything I would later encounter in my dealings with other countries." In March 1989, however, the Bush administration got its deal through Congress. Less than a year later, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas were voted out of office. Reagan's partisans can plausibly argue that the Sandinistas' defeat showed that, in the end, their policy worked. Given the speed with which the impasse broke once Bush decided to break it, however, an equally plausible reading is that Reagan's stubbornness retarded a solution for months or years. Either way, Bush cleared away the issue that had deadlocked foreign policy throughout the 1980s just in time to deal with the Soviet implosion.

The collapse of the Soviet empire may well have presented Bush with

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the most treacherous foreign policy environment since the Cuban missile crisis. Mikhail Gorbachev's position was precarious, and at any moment the Soviet Union might have ended in a violent explosion rather than the relatively calm implosion that actually occurred. Reagan undoubtedly deserves credit for restoring the pre-Nixon containment policy that finally pushed the Russians to the edge. He pointed American policy in the right direction, which was important. The really tricky part, however, was not choosing the direction but landing the plane.

German reunification, in particular, could have gone terribly wrong. It could have reignited the cold war, or even a hot one. "That was very tricky," says Ivo H. Daalder, a foreign policy analyst at the Brookings Institution. "This was what the cold war was about." East Germany was the linchpin of the Soviets' security structure in Europe, and even West Germany's European allies—Britain, France, Italy—were initially reluctant to see Germany quickly restored. Many Americans were skeptical, too, given the risks. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, if you were optimistic you hoped that the Soviets would allow peaceful unification of a neutral Germany. But if you had predicted the Soviets would let Germany unify within NATO, you would have been arrested on drug charges.

Reunification within NATO, however, was exactly what the Bush administration managed to broker. First Bush convinced Gorbachev that reunification was both inevitable and unthreatening, and then he convinced him that a Germany locked into NATO would be less troublesome to Moscow than a Germany on its own. Behind Gorbachev's back, Kremlin hard-liners vowed never to relinquish Russia's cold war prize—an outrageous humiliation, in their eyes. So Bush presented the Russians with an elaborate nine-point package of mostly anodyne face-savers. Astonishingly, it worked. On July 16, 1990, after joint talks with Helmut Kohl's German government, Gorbachev announced: "Whether we like it or not, the time will come when a united Germany will be in NATO, if that is its choice. Then, if that is the choice, to some degree and in some form, it can work together with the Soviet Union." At that moment, the cold war was over, and the airplane was on the ground.

IN HINDSIGHT, THE junta that subsequently tried to depose Gorbachev, thereby triggering the Soviet Union's final collapse, looks like a band of drunken clowns. Again, however, things might have gone very differently. The coup leaders promised to continue Gorbachev's policies and counted on the West to accept their seizure of power as a fait accompli. Bush, recognizing that the hard-liners didn't control the Russian army, refused. He demanded to talk to Gorbachev and established phone contact with Boris Yeltsin (Bush was the first Western leader to support Yeltsin publicly during the coup). "Coups can fail," he famously said. This one may have failed with or without American help. One can still wonder, however, whether Michael Dukakis, Reagan, or Clinton would have shown as sure a touch.

So the record begins to add up. If Bush had done nothing more than peacefully close out the cold war, clear up the S&L crisis, and lance the Nicaraguan boil, that would, I think, be enough to qualify him as an imposing figure among recent presidents, even (or especially) compared with Reagan. And then there is the Gulf war.

I opposed the Gulf war in 1990. It seemed to me that America's interest in rolling back Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, while important, was not worth the risk of a military quagmire. Surely the coalition would split, or sand would disable the helicopters, or the assault would bog down; and in any case it would all be fantastically expensive. To this day I believe I would have been right but for one thing: Bush. I won't rehash what is by now a familiar story—Bush's virtuosity in assembling and maintaining the coalition, the unwavering determination that brought Congress and the public around, the dramatic success of the war effort itself. As an almost comical frosting on the cake, Bush even managed to turn a profit on the war, since the allies overpaid for it.

The ending, plainly, was imperfect. Failing to disable the Iraqi Republican Guard was a mistake, as was failing to stop Saddam from using his helicopters and troops to terrorize the Kurds and thus reestablish his footing. Saddam has clung to power much more tenaciously than Bush, or anybody else, expected. Still, while the ambiguous ending diminished the triumph, it did not vitiate it. Reagan restored America's confidence, but Bush showed what American confidence meant. Bill Clinton and the country are still drawing on the credit that Bush built up.

CLINTON'S PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT, and Vice President Al Gore's strongest selling point, is the remarkably robust economy. Fair enough; Clinton (and Alan Greenspan) deserve praise. But Clinton could never have done what he did without Bush.

When Bush took office, Congress had managed, with Reagan's grudging and sporadic support, to reduce the deficit to just over three percent of the gross domestic product, from a 1983 peak of almost twice that. But the outlook was not good. Structurally, the budget was still out of whack. In 1990, as the economy slowed, red ink began spilling over the dam. The $100 billion "baseline" deficit projected in early 1990 (for fiscal 1991) had turned into about $160 billion by summer.

In 1988, Bush had made a foolish promise: "Read my lips: No new taxes!" The promise was irresponsible, but it was a political milestone, and there was no going back. The Republican Party became the "No new taxes" party, as it still is. (Today, you don't need to be pro-life, pro-gun, or anti-gay to be a good Republican, but you do need to be anti-tax.) Trapped by his own words, Bush found himself in an excruciating position. He could do the right thing politically or the right thing fiscally, but not both.

In June 1990, after weeks of deadlocked talks with the Democratic Congress, Bush published a statement acknowledging that "tax revenue increases" would be part of a budget package. In other words, he betrayed his conservative base to make a budget deal with the Democrats. Conservatives never forgave him. When he double-crossed them, he lost himself the presidency.

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You can say Bush was politically naïve, even suicidal, to break his tax promise, and you can say the promise was irresponsible to begin with. But you can't deny this fact: It was Bush's budget deal that broke the deficit's back. According to calculations by former Congressional Budget Office Director Robert D. Reischauer (using CBO data), in 1993 Clinton pushed through $433 billion in deficit reduction over five years, or almost seven percent of GDP. And the press is still congratulating him for it. But if Clinton was brave in 1993, what does that make Bush in 1990? His budget agreement—signed with Democrats, over his own party's opposition—reduced the deficit by $482 billion over five years, or close to nine percent of GDP. Relative to the economy, Bush's anti-deficit package was 27 percent larger than Clinton's.

Today, with the deficit safely extinguished and the national debt heading down, it is easy to forget how genuinely dire the country's finances were in the '80s. By breaking his promise, Bush put out Reagan's fiscal house fire, and he enabled Clinton and the strong economy to rebuild the house. Bush thus made two presidents' reputations and unmade his own.

STILL UNIMPRESSED? PERHAPS you think a really fine president soars on majestic wings of inspiring rhetoric and leaves behind mighty works. By that standard, Bush was indeed unimpressive. But that standard is wrong.

In November 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed the Civil Works Administration. Within several weeks it employed millions of people; by winter's end it was shut down. But those days are long gone. Today's enormous and arthritic government, with its dense incrustation of entrenched lobbies and permanent programs, lacks the flexibility to rebuild itself, much less society. When Clinton shifted from his massive and bureaucratic health-care-reform proposal to his long strings of targeted microinitiatives, he bowed before not only the Republicans but reality. Today, presidents' powers are limited, most grandiose reforms are folly, and lofty rhetoric is no substitute for sound judgment in a tight corner.

A modern president is pretty darned good if he can cope adeptly with a crisis and otherwise avoid serious mistakes. The second criterion—avoiding major blunders—is especially hard for romantics and pundits to appreciate. But politics is a stream of temptations to pander, grandstand, and overreact. Consistently resisting those temptations requires maturity and toughness, as Bush's response (or nonresponse) to the recession of the early '90s makes clear.

A recession is the most perilous of times for politicians and for economic policy. Especially in an election year, presidents will do anything to avert a recession, including waste a lot of money or gin up inflation (Nixon did both). Night after night in 1991 and 1992, the newscasts hammered Bush with images of unemployment lines and layoffs. The politically smart thing would have been to promise some elixir to rescue the economy, as Clinton did with his "stimulus package" (which Congress mercifully rejected). The economically wise thing to do, however, was exactly what Bush did: nothing. The eight-month Bush recession was the mildest in memory, and it was over by the time it became a campaign issue. Stimulus then would have been pointless.

Bush's error was failing to explain why he was doing the right thing by doing nothing. But perhaps explaining would have been hopeless in any event. The voters and the TV cameras were in no mood to listen. Only today, long after the fact, do those voters seem to understand.

OF COURSE BUSH made mistakes. He understandably but tragically misread the breakup of Yugoslavia, believing the United States could stand aside from what soon became the Bosnian horror, which eventually sucked America in anyway. (Clinton, of course, did no better.) Bush was right to maintain Nixon's policy of engagement with China; but the administration's clinking of goblets with the Chinese just after the Tiananmen massacre was strikingly insensitive and stigmatized that sound policy for years to come. He championed the overly broad Americans with Disabilities Act, which entrenched and extended the metamorphosis of civil rights law from broadly guaranteeing equal opportunity to requiring discrimination in favor of minorities and minutely overseeing details of everyday life. Above all, Bush was a poor politician, and politics in its best sense—bringing the public along, making people feel led, packaging and selling an agenda—is part of the job. Even Harry Truman, who, like Bush, was both prudent and unpopular, got himself reelected.

Still, as presidential mistakes go, Bush's were trivial compared to Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam calamity, Nixon's inflation and wage-and-price controls and budget-busting entitlement increases and Watergate, or Carter's economic mismanagement and hostage crisis. Reagan was better, but he did to the government's finances what the iceberg did to the *Titanic*. Clinton, after two bad years, learned to manage the public and avoid big mistakes—but then came The Mistake, or, if you feel less charitable, The Crime.

The public may be coming to appreciate the sort of unglamorous, surefooted presidency that Bush represents. In both parties this year, voters flirted with big plans, blazing rhetoric, and "new politics" and then chose incrementalism, executive experience, and ordinary politics. In that sense, if in no other, George H.W. Bush will have some measure of vindication, even if his son loses in November.

The joke, however, may be on the voters. They wanted a Bush, and they got a Bush—but by all appearances Junior is no Senior. Senior boasted a deep, varied resumé in government service; Junior counts his public service jobs on the fingers of one thumb. Senior was a man of substance over politics, even to a fault; Junior looks like politics all the way through. Senior was his own secretary of state, figuratively speaking; Junior leans heavily on hired help. Senior entered the presidency in the full ripeness of maturity; Junior—but this becomes cruel.

Come to think of it, the final joke may be on the Bushes, after all. The voters may decide they want someone uninspiring but reliable, someone experienced and substantial even if unglamorous and politically ungainly—someone, in short, more like President Bush than like Clinton or Reagan. And so they may vote for Al Gore. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Humming Again

THROUGH THE LAST years of the last century, I began to hear a hum. It sounded familiar, but it took some time for me to place it. Then I remembered. In 1970 I had edited an anthology of American film criticism—from its beginnings to *Citizen Kane*—and I had spent days in libraries leafing through the yellowed, friable pages of the first American film magazines, such as the *Moving Picture World* and *Moving Picture News* (I hope that those magazines are now electronically stored.) As I turned those yellowed pages, they seemed to give off heat, and with that heat a hum. Aside from the brief reviews, the stories were mostly about business deals, nickelodeons opened, distributors organized, studios founded (they were sometimes called "factories"), pictures planned; still, it seemed that everyone involved, from inventors to investors, was on fire. Few of them may have stopped to consider it, but all of them sensed—or seemed to sense—that they were involved in one of the most radical and important advances in the history of human consciousness. No one knew where the motion picture would lead, but all of them were convinced that it would lead somewhere exciting. And all of them were in at the beginning! "Bliss was in that dawn to be alive...."

When the feature film arrived, around 1910, replacing the shorts with which the industry had started, the furor exploded further. Said Benjamin B. Hampton in his *History of the American Film Industry*:

> Superlatives are needed to describe the success of the screen when films reached the storytelling length of a thousand feet. ... In every city and large town in the country so many customers appeared at ticket windows that there were not enough halls or upstairs rooms to seat them, and a new type of playhouse had to be created to accommodate them.

Said David Robinson in *From Peep Show to Palace*:

> Available statistics ... suggest that the number of nickelodeons in the United States doubled between 1907 and 1908 to around 8,000, and by 1914, when the 5 cent theater was already being supplanted by grander houses, was around 14,000. By 1910 it was estimated that 26 million Americans visited these theaters every week.

I can still remember the hum of excitement from those old magazine pages.

It didn't take long to see why I was hearing it again. The rush was on again—to cyberspace. Avalanches of people were pouring into the new computer world: inventors, manufacturers, users. Every week, every day—every hour, it seemed—someone was finding a new use, a new device, a new extension of this marvelous electronic power. The excitement that leaped off the news pages was much like the heat of the Edison-Griffith days: the sense that mankind was making a leap forward in consciousness at such speed and of such importance that no one could yet calculate its size or reach.

People in the arts have responded to this phenomenon with fear or reluctance or compliance—and, eventually, with carefully fashioned hope. A greatly experienced book publisher, Jason Epstein, wrote recently in the *New York Review of Books* of the depredations that the World Wide Web has worked on traditional publishing and book selling, yet he bases his hopes for the future of publishing on that same Web. He sees a paradoxical blessing in the Web: it can help publishing to return to its lost simplicities. The Web can free it of its latter-day corporate burdens. All the industrial aspects can be "assigned to specialist firms. Book publishing may therefore become once more a cottage industry of diverse, creative, autonomous units, or so there is now reason to believe."

In the film world, it's different. As Godfrey Cheshire and others have lately been telling us, computer-related technologies like digital filmmaking and the cable distribution of films to theaters have their benefits but also their grave risks, from the technical to the creative. (The latest news on this front is that much of the Roman grandeur in *Gladiator* was digitally manufactured. Today all electrodes lead to Rome.) So far, it is hard to see, as Epstein does for publishing, any intrinsic blessings in the computer age for the art of film.

Still, one can always rely, residually, on the Law of Exceptions—one of the premier elements in human activity. When we look at the burst of film energy a hundred years ago, we see the rush for a new Klondike: gold in them hills! Concern about the possibilities for art back then were much tinier than the chance for profit. But, in proof, is money-making all that came out of a hundred years of film? Was it all mere merchandise and merchandising? The exceptions arrived and keep arriving.

Ignore for a moment the peaks of Ford and Bergman and Fellini and Bresson and Ozu and Antonioni. Look at the present. Look at some of the films that have been made in this country in the last twelve months, made in a culture that is increasingly homogenized and mass-produced. I do not admire these films equally, a few of them not at all, but just consider their individuality.

From the Hollywood factories have come in the last year:

The Straight Story. An infirm elderly man rides a lawn mower across Iowa to visit his ailing brother.

Time Code. The screen is split into four parts throughout, telling stories, in actual elapsed time, that ultimately flow together.

The Virgin Suicides. Five teenaged sisters in a small town kill themselves, with no explanation offered.

The Big Kahuna. Three salesmen in a hotel suite, which the picture almost never leaves, explore their souls.

Being John Malkovich. An almost Kafkaesque prank about office lives and private dreams.

Jakob the Liar. A big star plays a Jewish concentration-camp prisoner who is killed.

Breakfast of Champions. A highly stylized, quasi-symbolic comedy about a world of salesmen and sex.

Ed TV. The appalling standards of the TV audience are held up to excoriation.

Joe Gould's Secret. A picture made solely for its portrait of a Greenwich Village eccentric many decades ago.

Is this a list of much-munched commercial clichés?

Obviously the flood of formulaic entertainments, good and less good, roared all around these exceptions, but the fact that these films came into being in that quaint, old-fashioned twentieth-century production system makes it seem possible that there will also be exceptions in the

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new technological order. "Or so," as Epstein says about publishing, "there is now reason to believe." The cyberspace hum of excitement, like its forebear when film was being born, may not be a golden doom, may bring its own exceptions.

Just so I don't sound too sanguine, let me add a sadder note. There is a declining interest in film style. One characteristic of the best directors through the last century was their concern with the *way* they told their stories as much as with the stories themselves. It seemed to them, or so it seemed to us, that there was no point in telling a story, no matter how important or urgent it was, unless it was presented in a manner that conveyed the maker's vision, that was integral to the material. We cannot look at much of a Sternberg or Truffaut or Godard or Lang or Hitchcock or Kurosawa film without recognizing the author. This recognizability was not the central point, yet the maker of the film wanted his making of it to be so apt, so personal, that it was hard to imagine the story otherwise.

Nowadays this ambition has diminished. The newer directors today, including most of those who made the pictures listed above, are concerned to present their work clearly, not much more. (The exception is David Lynch, director of *The Straight Story*.) Reasons for this decline in stylistic concern are easy to speculate about—society, in the last thirty years or so, has dampened individualism; film economics have made it a sufficient victory to get a daring film green-lighted, without making waves in method, and so on. We cannot be sure of these or any other reasons as yet. But this question lies deeper than technological change, deeper than electronics, so it is more worrisome. ■

Throwing Away the Clef

By CYNTHIA OZICK

Ravelstein by Saul Bellow

(Viking, 233 pp., $24.95)

I.

ROMAN À CLEF? Never mind. When it comes to novels, the author's life is nobody's business. A novel, even when it is autobiographical, is not an autobiography. If the writer himself leaks the news that such-and-such a character is actually so-and-so in real life, readers still have an obligation—fiction's enchanted obligation—to shut their ears and turn away. A biographer may legitimately wish to look to *Buddenbrooks*, say, to catch certain tonalities of Thomas Mann's early years; but a reader is liberated from the matching game. Fiction is subterranean, not terrestrial. Or it is like Tao: say what it is, and that is what it is not.

One reason to read imaginative literature is to be carried off into the strangeness of an unknown planet, not to be dogged by the verifiable facts of this one. Why should we care for blunt information—for those ephemeral figures that fictional creatures are "based on"? The originals vanish; their simulacra, powerful marvels, endure. Does it matter that *The Rape of the Lock* makes sport of one Arabella Fermor and of the eminent Lord Petre? Fermor and Petre are bones. Belinda and Sir Plume go on frolicking from line to frothy line of Pope's comic ode. Who lives forever—Flimnap, the all-important Treasurer of the Kingdom of Lilliput, or his sent-up model, Sir Robert Walpole, gone to dust two and a half centuries ago? Why should Philip Roth's "Philip Roth" be Philip Roth?

And why should Saul Bellow's Ravelstein be Allan Bloom? Or, to turn the question around (the better to get at an answer), why should Saul Bellow's Ravelstein *not* be Allan Bloom? It might be argued that Bellow has a fat track record of insinuating into his fiction the frenziedly brilliant men he has known, intellectuals given to complications: in *Humboldt's Gift*, Delmore Schwartz; in "Zetland: By a Character Witness," Isaac Rosenfeld; in "What Kind of Day Did You Have?," Harold Rosenberg. And now, in *Ravelstein*, Allan Bloom, Bellow's late colleague at the University of Chicago's School of Social Thought.

But Bloom and Bellow were more entangled—more raveled—than academic colleagues usually are: they were cognitive companions, mutual brain-pickers, and (in Bloom's Platonic lingo) true friends. For Bloom especially, friendship was a calling, "the community of those who seek the truth, the potential knowers." In 1987, Bellow supplied a foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom's startling best-seller—startling because it *was* a best-seller, despite its countless invocations of Socrates, Herodotus, Nietzsche, Hobbes, Locke, Descartes, Spinoza, Bacon, Newton, and all the other denizens of the philosophical mind. Summing up Bloom, Bellow faithfully reported, "Professor Bloom is neither a debunker nor a satirist, and his conception of seriousness carries him far beyond the positions of academia"—and then ran off the Bloomian rails to tumble into engaging self-clarification.

WITH FAMILIAR ANTIC Bellovian bounce, Bellow wrote, "There was not a chance in the world that Chicago, with the agreement of my eagerly Americanizing extended family, would make me in its image. Before I was capable of thinking clearly, my resistance to its material weight took the form of obstinacy. I couldn't say why I would not allow myself to become the product of an *environment*. But gainfulness, utility, prudence, business, had no hold on me. My mother wanted me to be a fiddler, or, failing that, a rabbi." (He became, in a way, both: a fiddler with the sharps and flats of American prose, and a metaphysical ruminator.) Bloom, too, in the final pages of his book, spoke of living "independent of accidents, of circumstance"—a view, Bellow affirmed, that was "the seed from which my life grew."

Two self-propelled thinkers, freed from predictive forces. They had in common an innate longing, revealed in youth, for the bliss of Idea. Bloom, under the head "From Socrates's *Apology* to Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede*": "When I was fifteen years

CYNTHIA OZICK's new book of essays, *Quarrel & Quandary*, will be published by Knopf in the fall.

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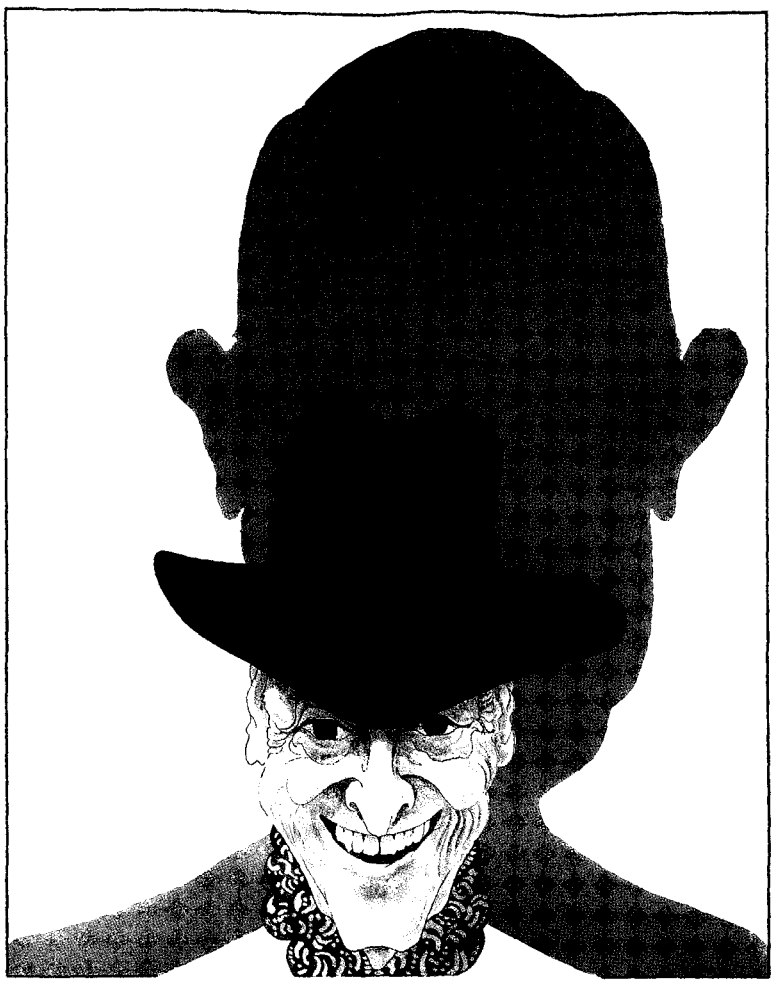
old I saw the University of Chicago for the first time and somehow sensed that I had discovered my life." The university, he early came to understand, "provided an atmosphere of free inquiry, and therefore excluded what is not conducive to or is inimical to such inquiry. It made a distinction between what is important and not important. It protected the tradition, not because tradition is tradition but because tradition provides models of discussion on a uniquely high level. It contained marvels and made possible friendships consisting in shared experiences of those marvels." And Bellow, spilling the beans among the wayward paragraphs of his foreword: "Reluctantly my father allowed me at seventeen to enter the university, where I was an enthusiastic (wildly excited) but erratic and contrary student. If I signed up for Economics 201, I was sure to spend all my time reading Ibsen and Shaw. Registering for a poetry course, I was soon bored by meter and stanzas, and shifted my attention to Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* and Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*... I preferred to read poetry on my own without the benefit of lectures on the caesura." Both young men are "wildly excited" by this opening into the seductions of ultimate meaning. One becomes an extraordinary teacher. The other becomes Saul Bellow. One writes the cardboard sentences, workmanlike and often mentally exhilarating, of the intellectual nonwriter. The other *writes*.



Saul Bellow by Vint Lawrence for The New Republic

For years, until Bloom's death, the two are true friends—a friendship bred in Chicago, with robust tendrils stretching toward ancient Athens and the dustiness of Upper Broadway. Bloom, like the Ravelstein of Bellow's novel, is in thrall to Socrates. Like Ravelstein, he publishes a volume critical of the displacement of humanist liberal culture by the pieties of political cant. Like Ravelstein, he earns a fortune from his book and feels the venom of the radical Left. Like Ravelstein, he is a homosexual who reveres eros and scorns gay rights; again like Ravelstein, he has a Chinese lover. This ought to be more than enough to make the case for *Ravelstein* as a roman à clef. But there is no case. Or: to make the case in so literal a fashion, one-on-one (on all fours, as lawyers put it), is to despise the idea of the novel—the principle of what a novel *is*—and to harbor a private lust to destroy it.

In scary-kitschy old movies, an ambition-crazed scientist constructs in his laboratory two ominously identical boxes, in the shape of telephone booths, side by side. He enters one, the door shuts, a fearful electrical buzz follows, lights flash and darken, and suddenly the first box is empty and the scientist stands, intact, in the other: a triumph of molecular disintegration and reintegration; instant transportation sans trolley or rocket. If you are ready to believe this, you will accept the notion of roman à clef—that a life is transferable from flesh to print; that since the resemblances line up ever so nicely, Ravelstein "is" Bloom. Under this persuasion, fiction is hijacked by gossip, the vapor of transience. Under this persuasion, Bellow's own admission (he has confirmed that his model was Bloom) invites the scandal of outing: Ravelstein dies of AIDS; then did Bloom, who never intimated having the disease, die of it? Bloom's politics, enemies, sexual habits, even his dying, are all freshly rehearsed—because Ravelstein is Bloom.

Ravelstein is not Bloom. To insist on it is hardly to allow Bloom to speak for himself in what is left of him. Bloom, dead, is (as a doctor once described to me the condition of a newly deceased relative) a pile of electrons. Bloom, still lively, continues his worthy arguments in teacherly discourses that, far from staling, have intensified at a time when dot-com merges with New Age. Say of Bloom what Bloom said of Leo Strauss, his venerated teacher: that he "left his own memorial in the body of works in which what he understood to be his essence lives on." Say this; but not that Bellow has written Bloom.

That Bellow himself acknowledges Bloom as his subject—acknowledges it with all the authority of the mighty *New York Times* behind him—means nothing, or almost nothing, in the kingdom of the novel. A writer's extra-literary utterance (blunt information), pre-novel or post-novel, may infiltrate journalism; but it cannot touch the novel itself. Fiction does not invent out of a vacuum, but it invents; and what it invents is, first, the fabric and the cadence of language, and then a slant of idea that sails out of these as a fin lifts from the sea.

The art of the novel (worn yet opulent phrase) is in the mix of idiosyncratic language—language imprinted in the writer, like the whorl of the fingertip—and an unduplicatable design inscribed on the mind by character and image. Invention has little capacity for the true-to-life snapshot. It is true to its own stirrings. The real-life Bloom, steeped in a congeries of arresting social propositions, lacked language and metaphor—which is why the legacy of his books can replicate his thought, but not the mysterious crucible of his breath.

Bellow, in going after his friend's mystery, leaves Bloom behind—just as in past novels and stories he ultimately deserted Rosenberg, Rosenfeld, and Schwartz, those latter-day piles of electrons, who, like Bloom, are obliged to live on, impressively enough, in the ink of their own

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fingerprints. Bellow's is an independent art. The souls who thrive or shrivel in his fiction ("soul" being his most polemical term) are not replicas; they are primal coinages, unbounded by flesh and likely to be faithless to fact. Literary verisimilitude is a chimera. Look to the "stein" in Ravelstein for a suggestive clue: the philosopher's stone that turns base metal into gold. Allan Bloom, Bellow's supremely intelligent Chicago compatriot, had the university professor's usual tin ear for prose (his own). But the philosopher's stone does not mimic or reproduce; it transmutes. Bloom's tin is Ravelstein's gold.

Lifestyle raised to a right equal to other human rights was what Bloom particularly excoriated; such relativism, he believed, led to "nihilism as moralism." Recently in these pages Andrew Sullivan speculated that Bloom's homosexuality "may even have reinforced his conservatism"—a striking observation, but what is it doing in the context of Bellow's novel? An essay on Bloom ought to be an essay on Bloom. It is important to repudiate the tag of roman à clef not only because it is careless and rampant, but because it reduces and despoils the afflatus—and the freedom—of the literary imagination. The clef gets stuck in the lock, and the lock attaches to fetters.

II.

And so to the real Ravelstein of the novel. I am reluctant to speak of Bellow's "voice," a writerly term overgrown with academic fungus, and by now nearly useless. (Consider also the ruination by English departments of "gaze," that magical syllable, fully and foully theorized into ash.) Better to return to Bellow's mother, who hoped for a fiddling son; better to think of him as a sentence-and-paragraph fiddler, or a rabbi presiding over an unruly congregation of words. The words are unruly because they refuse to be herded into categories of style: they are high, low, shtick, softshoe, pensive, mystical, sermonic, eudemonic—but never catatonic; always on the move, in the swim, bathed in some electricity-conducting effluvium. Bellow's incremental sound—or noise—rejects imitation the way the human immune system will reject foreign tissue.

There are no part-Bellows or next-generation Bellows; there are no literary descendants. As for precursors, Bellow's jumpy motor has more in common (while not so lavishly baroque) with the engine that ratchets Gerard Manley Hopkins's lines—that *run-run-turn-stop!*—than with any prose ancestor. In *Ravelstein* he puts these racing weight-bearing energies to use in something that ought not to be called a "portrait." ("What an olden-days' word 'portraying' has become," says Chick, the novel's narrator.) Verbal sculpture is more like it: think of those Roman busts with strong noses and naked heads, round heavy stone on square heavy plinths. Ravelstein's head is central, tactile, dominant, and it is examined with a sculptor's or architect's eye. "On his bald head you felt that what you were looking at were the finger marks of its shaper." "This tall pin- or chalk-striped dude with his bald head (you always felt there was something dangerous about its whiteness, its white force, its dents)..." "He liked to raise his long arms over the light gathered on his bald head and give a comic cry." "There are bald heads that proclaim their strength. Ravelstein's head had been like that." "His big eyes were concentrated in that bald, cranial watchtower of his." "You couldn't imagine an odder container for his odd intellect. Somehow his singular, total, almost geological baldness implied that there was nothing hidden about him." "The famous light of Paris was concentrated on his bald head." And so on, image upon image. Ravelstein's is not so much a man's head as it is a lit dome: the dome of some high-ceilinged cathedral or broad-corridored library. Ravelstein's ideas—also his gossip, his extravagant wants—are solidly housed. This head is no hotel for brief mental sojourns.

A hotel is where we first meet Abe Ravelstein—the lavish penthouse of the Hotel Crillon, in Paris, where the luxury-intoxicated humanities professor, "who only last year had been a hundred thousand dollars in debt," is reveling in the millions piled up by his best-seller. Ravelstein is a sybarite; and he is a man who would know the Greek origin of that word. His appetite for $5,000 designer suits, silk ties, gold pens, mink quilts, French crystal, smuggled Cuban cigars, Oriental carpets, antique sideboards, and all the other paraphernalia of the dedicated voluptuary, is accompanied by a philosopher's scrupulous worship of civic virtue.

He is also a principled atheist, a homosexual (quietly, privately), a bit of a matchmaker, a thinker "driven by longing"—a longing understood as Aristophanes meant it, the haunted desire for human completion. He likes puns and gags, he likes meddling in the lives of his brightest students, he likes being ahead of the news (thanks to former students now in high places); his cell phone is at the ready. Socrates is his ideal and Thucydides his immediacy, but he is as alert to contemporary anti-Semitic subtleties and historic anti-Jewish depredations as he

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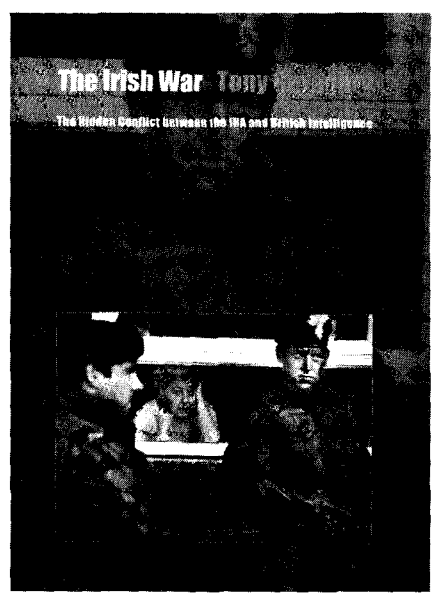

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is to the problems of Alcibiades in the Sicilian campaign of the Peloponnesian War. Chick—the not-so-famous midlist writer who is Ravelstein's catch-as-catch-can biographer—seizes his subject at the crux: "He preferred Athens, but he respected Jerusalem greatly."

Commenting and kibitzing in the first person, Chick (a self-described "serial marrier") mostly keeps a low profile, except in the matter of his wives: Vela, the vengeful Romanian physicist who walks out on him, and Rosamund, the loyal, intelligent, empathic young woman who was once Ravelstein's student. Other characters pass, or hurtle, through Chick's recording cascades: Nikki, Ravelstein's presumed lover, "a handsome, smooth-skinned, black-haired, Oriental, graceful, boyish man," for whom Ravelstein buys a chestnut-colored BMW with kid-leather upholstery; Rachmiel Kogon, "tyrannically fixated, opinionated," a genuine ex-Oxonian don but a fake Brit, owner of complete sets of Dickens, James, Hume, and Gibbon; Morris Herbst, an observant Jew with a heart transplant obtained from the deadly crash of a goyish motorcyclist in Missouri; Radu Grielescu, a renowned Jungian mythologist and Nazi-tainted former Iron Guardist, who play-acts blameless politesse; Battle, paratrooper, pilot, ballroom dancer, Sanskrit scholar, with "the mouth of a Celtic king." They represent, in Chick's phrase, "penetrations of the external world." Accounting for them to the impatient Ravelstein—who recommends a larger concern for society and politics—Chick argues, "I had no intention . . . of removing, by critical surgery, the metaphysical lenses I was born with."

It is these powerful lenses that finally raise questions about how a novel—generically, *the* novel—is to be fathomed. *Ravelstein* is busy with revelatory incident but is mainly plotless: Ravelstein becomes ill, rallies, retains his acerbic nobility, declines further, and begins the slide into death. At Ravelstein's hospital bedside, Chick uncovers the mundane secret of the philosopher's eloquent cranial dome. "Now and then I put my hand to my friend's bald head," he confides. "I was surprised to find that there was an invisible stubble on his scalp. He seemed to have decided that total baldness suited him better than thinning hair, and shaved his head as well as his cheeks. Anyway," Chick concludes, "this head was rolling toward the grave."

A mightiness theatricalized by the razor's artifice; a mightiness at last undone. Following which, Rosamund and Chick vacation in the Caribbean ("one huge tropical slum," Chick characterizes these islands), where he eats spoiled fish and nearly perishes from the effects of poisoning; Rosamund's intrepid devotion through an extended medical ordeal saves him. This final occurrence, the novel's climactic scene, seems out of kilter with the rich thick Ravelstein stew that precedes it. Chick's preoccupations veer off the Ravelsteinian tracks into the demands of his own circumstances, much as Bellow, in his foreword to Bloom's blockbuster, ran off the Bloomian rails to grapple with his own spirit.

BUT BY NOW Ravelstein is dead; and a novel is not a biography. Biographies are innately saddled with structure. When the biographer's subject dies, the biography comes to a close. What else can it choose to do? A novel need make no such obeisance to graph or sine curve, or to the deeper curve of death's scythe. Only the lower orders of fiction—case solved, romance consummated—abide by ordained rigidities and patterns. The literary novel (call it the artist's novel) engenders freedom, flexibility, exemption from determined outcomes; waywardness and surprise. What falls out then is not story (or not only story), but certain obstinacies and distillations, which can be inspected solely through Chick's metaphysical lenses. It can even be argued that it is only through this supra-optical equipment that fiction's necessary enactments can be prodded into lustiness.

What "metaphysical" intends is not left unspecified: it is the earthly shock of Creation's plenitude. "Ordinary daily particulars were my specialty," Chick explains. "The heart of things is shown in the surface of those things." Elsewhere he illustrates: "I carried [Rosamund] through the water, the sand underfoot ridged as the surface of the sea was rippled, and inside the mouth the hard palate had its ridges too." Out of the blue, the ridges of the hard palate! A planetary connectedness, a Darwinian propensity for minute perceiving—which Ravelstein, whose thought runs vertically through history, both marvels at and chides.

Here Rosamund sides with her old teacher: "But this is how you do things, Chick: the observations you make crowd out the main point." They are discussing Grielescu, the concealed Iron Guardist. "How could such a person be politically dangerous?" Chick counters. "His jacket cuffs come down over his knuckles." An instant of comic toughness, reminiscent of the famous crack in *Augie March*: "He had rich blood. His father peddled apples." But Grielescu, a minor character, barely a walk-on, is the novel's suboceanic mover: he is like the ridges of the hard palate inside the mouth. Once you become conscious of these shallow bumps, you cannot leave off exploring them—they lead you mentally to the treacherous floor of the deepest sea.

In Ravelstein's exuberant mind-roving prime, his memoirist recalls, he had been absorbed in nasty speculations about Grielescu's Nazi past: how Grielescu had been summoned to lecture in Jerusalem and how the invitation was soon withdrawn. Weakening now, under death's lintel, Ravelstein appears to be enveloped in Jewish fate, in the twentieth century's "great evil." What was once a flicker in a crepuscular background, veiled by a Greek passion for polis and eros, invades and illumines his still-pulsing intellect. "'It was unusual for him these days, in any conversation, to mention Plato or even Thucydides. He was full of Scripture now," Chick records. "In his last days it was the Jews he wanted to talk about, not the Greeks."

ATHENS GIVES WAY to Jerusalem—but it is understood, anyhow, that Socrates had always been Ravelstein's rebbe, and Periclean Athens his yeshiva. Ravelstein's final dictum: in the wake of "such a volume of hatred and the denial of the right to live," Jews are "historically witness to the absence of redemption." For the reader looking back on Ravelstein's musings as preserved by Chick, a great totting-up looms. Of a French landlord's ancestry: "Those Gobineaus were famous Jew-haters." Of Grielescu's myth-expertise: "The Jews had better understand their status with respect to myth. Why should they have any truck with myth? It was myth that demonized them." Of Jews and teaching: "We are a people of teachers. For millennia, Jews have taught and been taught. Without teaching, Jewry was an impossibility." Of a luncheon for T. S. Eliot, where the snooty hostess complains of Ravelstein's manners: "She wasn't going to let any kike behave badly at *her* table." And again: "And what will T. S. Eliot think of us!"

That last gibe is to the point. How would Eliot assess an American novelist (one of those "free-thinking Jews" he deplored) so confident of writer's sovereignty that he can fiddle with the English language with all the freewheeling relish of an Elizabethan inventing new inflections—and in such a way as to make *The Waste Land* (and, God knows, those solemnified essays and plays) seem lethargic? "I had a Jewish life to lead in the American language," Chick announces, "and that's not a language that's helpful with dark thoughts." But it is through Chick's dark thoughts—and not only Ravelstein's—that we are apprised, or reminded, of Lloyd George's, Kipling's, and Voltaire's hot anti-Semitism and of "the

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Wehrmacht way of getting around responsibility for their crimes," and of German militarism as "the bloodiest and craziest kind of *revanchist* murderous zeal."

This is a long way from Rachel née Rabinovitch's murderous paws; and it is also a substantial distance from the mannerly fear of nomenclature that paradoxically turned Nathan Weinstein into the ferocious Nathanael West. Sovereignty for a novelist means unleashing the language of one's marrow and—not secondarily—tunneling into any subject matter, however transgressive it may be of the current societal glyph. (Think of that other Bloom, the *echt*-Dubliner. And note that Ravelstein's snooty hostess is named Mrs. Glyph.)

Hence Chick's reflections on leading a Jewish life in the American language are light-years from the rivalrous group tenets of multiculturalism, and ought not to be mistaken for them. The reviewer who called *Ravelstein* "Bellow's most Jewish novel" is only partly right; on second thought, if he means it as essence or circumscription, he is all wrong. It is not the nature of subject matter that defines a novel. It is the freedom to be at home in *any* subject matter; and the principle holds for Louis Auchincloss as much as it holds for Saul Bellow. All subject matter is equal under the law (or the democratic lawlessness) of the novel.

What is a novel? A persuasion toward dramatic interiority. A word-hoard that permits its inventor to stand undefined, unprescribed, liberated from direction or coercion. Freedom makes sovereignty; it is only when the writer is unfettered by external expectations that clarity of character—Ravelstein, for instance, bald and baldly opinionated, intellectually quarrelsome, a comic epicurean, a hospitable thinker with trembling hands, a Jew tormented by evil and pedagogically fixed on virtue—can be imagined into being. When, apropos of Bloom's credo, Bellow insisted that "I would not allow myself to become the product of an *environment*," he had a canny interest in those italics. As for the idea of roman à clef: what is it if not the product, and the imprisoning imposition, of an environment? ■

The Bright Book of Strife

By ANTHONY GRAFTON

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream by Francesco Colonna translated and with an introduction by Joscelyn Godwin

(Thames & Hudson, 474 pp., $70)

UNDER A BOWER, roofed with a canopy of densely woven leaves, the statue of a god's head, arms, and torso rests on an altar. His bearded face glowers; he holds a scythe in one hand and a bowl in the other. Around the sculpture stand a few men in robes and a great many young women in scoop-necked, high-waisted dresses, their hair prettily dressed in tight ringlets. Some of them play trumpets and recorders; others hold vessels over their heads, preparing to throw them. Blossoms and bottles arc through the air. In the foreground, a woman holds the head of a screaming sacrificial ass, decked with fruits and flowers. A second woman, this one with a bowl, catches the blood that sprays from a slit in the animal's neck. From the front of the altar a massive set of male genitalia projects upwards and outwards, dramatically outlined and set off by cross-hatching. The woodcut records a ceremony of prayer to the "the protector of gardens"—the ancient rustic god Priapus.

The author of the accompanying text describes this bloody sacrifice with as much admiration, and as much passionate interest in small details of ritual behavior, as the illustrator. In the middle of Christian Europe—in a book probably

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written by a Dominican friar, and published in the sacred city of Venice—the ancient religion of fertility has come back to life. Text and illustration alike invite the reader to participate, virtually, in the sort of temporary holy community that was regularly created, in the same period, by such long-established Venetian ritual practices as the Doge's marriage to the sea.

The image of Priapus is only one of dozens of equally strange and fascinating woodcuts, executed by an anonymous Venetian artist of great brilliance, that appeared in 1499 in a book created by Aldo Manuzio, the greatest printer of the period—the *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*, or *Polifilo's Strife of Love in a Dream*. The book has long been famous—despite the obstacle presented at the outset by its frighteningly obscure title, a Greek compound word invented by the author, and many others that follow. Bibliophiles have paid stunning prices for pristine copies. Historians of art and of fine printing have noted the book's originality and artistry, dwelling on the unprecedented way in which its creators—to whose identity we will return—artfully interwove verbal and visual ways of telling the same story. But the original text—as opposed to its illustrations—has remained inaccessible, except to those who could read its difficult Italian or work with the French adaptation published in 1546. The English translation that appeared in 1592, the word of one "R.D." (probably Sir Robert Dallington, a member of the Essex circle), contains less than half of the original.

The distinguished house of Thames & Hudson, founded by Walter Neurath, has published a great deal of innovative work on Renaissance art—including important studies of the *Hypnerotomachia* by the great historian of art and architecture Rudolf Wittkower and others. It has now celebrated its fortieth anniversary—and the five hundredth anniversary of the book itself—by publishing a translation of the complete *Hypnerotomachia*, carried out by the musicologist and historian Joscelyn Godwin. Not only has the text been transmuted, for the first time, into lucid and serviceable English; it has also been printed in a modern version of the type font that Aldo used, and laid out in a way that approximates the original—closely enough that the reader can appreciate the way that text and illustrations complement, and sometimes do not complement, one another. Finely printed in Belgium, this massive book is a splendid piece of craftsmanship, a last boon to lovers of white paper and elegant type as the printed book dematerializes into the World-Wide Web.

The *Hypnerotomachia* tells a love story—that of the romance between one Polifilo and the lovely Polia. Polifilo dreams that he is wandering in a mysterious wood. There he has adventure after adventure, including a close encounter with a dragon and several closer ones with nymphs. Polifilo investigates mysterious ruins, examines stunningly beautiful statues and curious hieroglyphic inscriptions, and watches elaborate ritual processions and celebrations. Finally, he is reunited with his beloved Polia; together they travel, on Cupid's boat, crewed and rowed by singing nymphs, to Cytherea.

COURTESY THAMES AND HUDSON

"And here were the three brazen portals, crudely hacked into the living rock: an ancient work of incredible antiquity in the utter desolation of this site."

In the second part of the work, Polia tells her own story at the request of the nymphs. She explains how she had withdrawn to Diana's temple during an outbreak of plague. Approached by her lover, she rejected him. In an age of Petrarchan poets who turned the physical and mental pain inflicted by their girlfriends into verse rather than lawsuits, Polifilo naturally collapsed in a swoon, seemingly dead. Polia fled. But when she was confronted by the terrible spectacle of the punishments meted out by Love to women who defy him, and after being coached by a wise old nurse, she returned to the temple and brought him back to life.

Caught embracing by the high priestess of the temple, the lovers are chastised and driven out. Polia and Polifilo appeal to the priestess of Venus. Polifilo tells his story one more time, Polia plaits fragrant flowers into a wreath, places it on Polifilo's head and "with her two nectar- and cinnamon-scented lips she gave me a dove-like kiss." The nymphs dance and sing. Polia encircles Polifilo "like a garland." "A roseate blush" suffuses her cheeks. And as day dawns, the lady vanishes, and the entire story is revealed to have been a dream. "This was the point, o gentle readers"—says Polifilo at the start of the last section—"at which, alas, I awoke." The book ends in sweet sorrow, all illusions dispelled. And the exasperated reader is left wishing, as S.J. Perelman wrote after re-reading in tranquillity a goopy romantic novel that had thrilled him when he first read it in the 1920s, that he could have locked both protagonists up in a bedroom, equipped with a copy of Van de Velde's *Ideal Marriage*.

Many prose romances competed with the *Hypnerotomachia* for the reader's hard-earned ducat. But it stood out, in more than one way. Its physical appearance, in the first place, was extraordinary. Manuzio had a special Roman type font—round, elegantly proportioned, transcendently clear—cut for the work. More important still, the anonymous illustrator equipped the text with 174 woodcuts—images that rank with the most mysterious and powerful of the Renaissance. On page after page of the *Hypnerotomachia*,

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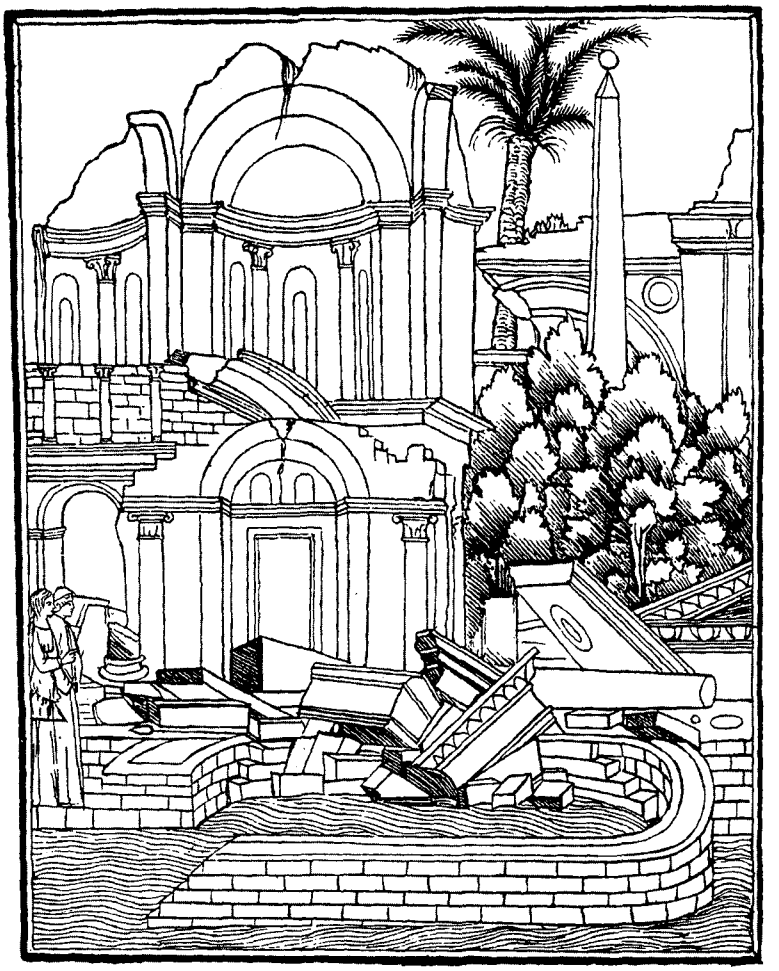
Polifilo and the reader encounter lucid, carefully drafted views of grandiose buildings, many of them in an attractively ruinous state; complex, crowded panoramas of neatly gowned young women, marching in processions or worshiping pagan gods; and pointed, witty narratives, set in crisply outlined spaces, perspective and volume meticulously indicated, like comic books drafted by Uccello. If some of the views of temples and palaces are drenched in romantic mystery, others are as crisp and subversive as Crazy Cat. The series that portrays Polifilo's wooing of his love shows Polia rejecting him; Polifilo swooning; and Polia, the dream mistress, dragging his inert body away by the feet—hardly the conduct one expects from the eternal feminine that draws her lover ever onwards into the dark forest of symbols.

The Venetian publishing quarter that stretched along the Merceria towards San Marco was the scene of intense activity. Almost 150 presses produced books there in the thirty years after the introduction of printing to the city in 1469. Locked in competition for buyers in a city "stuffed with books," as the pioneering book historian Martin Lowry has shown, publishers paid top wages to win the services of the best artisans, and did their best to make their wares attractive. Venetian books, accordingly, were often luxury products, adorned with finely executed woodcuts of leggy young men in tights and graceful young women with Ghirlandaio ringlets. One famous edition of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, printed in 1492–93, included splendid images of pageants that anticipated those in the *Hypnerotomachia*.

But no Venetian printed book, prior to the *Hypnerotomachia*, offered a continuous visual commentary, so precisely keyed, episode by episode, to an entire literary text. The illustrator's name is unknown. The most likely candidate for the job, however, is a characteristic figure of this period, when manuscripts still competed with printed books for the collectors' market: an illuminator named Benedetto Bordon, who applied all his traditional craft to the new technology of the woodcut. His work, styled and executed with great care for black-and-white reproduction, made the *Hypnerotomachia* endlessly attractive. No less an artist than Bernini found in it the inspiration for the spectacular obelisk-bearing elephant that he reared before the Roman church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

The other distinctive feature of the text was the invented dialect in which it was written, a nightmare version of Italian as spoken by a late Roman author somehow conjured back to life. In Italy, the later fifteenth century witnessed linguistic experimentation on the grand scale. Tuscans and others wrangled over the proper form of literary Italian, arguing about whether one dared use any word not employed by the classic writers of the fourteenth century, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Some humanist literati insisted on discussing the characters of popes and the validity of dogmas in perfect Ciceronian Latin, even though that meant that they had to call God "Jupiter Optimus Maximus" and find even less appropriate circumlocutions for salvation and the sacraments. Others pumped their prose full of strange Latin terms, words found only once in Petronius or Apuleius. Jews expelled from the yeshivot of the Iberian peninsula and Sicily explicated the doctrines of the Kabbalah to fascinated Italian scholars and churchmen, revealing that the forms of individual Hebrew letters had endowed them with enormous creative and destructive power. Meanwhile, antiquarians and explorers who had read about the mysterious pictorial language of the ancient Egyptians, in which each character perfectly expressed, in symbolic form, the concept it referred to, tried to match their information to the hieroglyphs still to be seen on obelisks and friezes in Rome.



"We had reached the broad and sandy shore, beaten by the gentle ebb and flow, where the ruined and deserted temple stood."

The author of the *Hypnerotomachia* tried out every one of these forms of linguistic experiment, and more. He drew recondite words by the dozen from Latin authors, and in smaller numbers from Greek ones, but he used them as if they were Italian. He thus created a partial Italian prototype for the French of Rabelais and the English of *Finnegans Wake*, the texture of which no normal translation can fully convey. Godwin offers one sample to suggest how a literal translation might read: "In this horrid and cuspidinous littoral and most miserable site of the algent and fetorific lake stood saevious Tisiphone, efferal and cruel." Only Baron Corvo could have produced an entire book in this style—and then no one would have been able to read it. No wonder that those who strove to keep Italian pure denounced the original as a defilement of their beloved language. No wonder either that Godwin has wisely chosen clarity over pedantic fidelity.

Not content with producing 500 pages of flamboyantly euphuistic prose, the author salted the text with illustrations of stones bearing imaginary inscriptions in more exotic languages, including Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Egyptian hieroglyphs of his own invention. The *Hypnerotomachia* called for deciphering rather than reading in any

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normal sense. In an age when learned men and women prided themselves on inventing clever heraldic devices and erudite philosophers believed that the ancient, puzzling axioms of Pythagoras and Zoroaster harbored great mysteries, this book of riddles with its patient narrator, always ready to describe another relief, proved endlessly attractive to many readers (even if skeptics such as the brilliant doctor and astrologer Girolamo Cardano insisted that it could best be used as a highly effective sedative). Handwritten marginal glosses in some copies supply definitions for the text's many unique terms. They give a sense of how hard readers were prepared to work as they followed Polifilo through his enchanted wood.

THE ANONYMITY OF the *Hypnerotomachia*'s illustrator is only one of the many mysteries connected with the book. By 1499, when it appeared, printers had long since realized that it made sense to equip their products with something manuscripts had normally lacked: a title page that gave the author's name, the book's title, and—in many cases—a blurb informing the reader of what he would find inside. The *Hypnerotomachia* had a title page. But it read only "The *Hypnerotomachia* of Polifilo, in which it is shown that all human things are but a dream, and many other things worthy of knowledge and memory." Like many early printed books, the *Hypnerotomachia* also had a colophon—a note at the end of the work, like those regularly left by scribes in manuscripts, which recorded that it reached completion at Treviso on May 1, 1467. No author's name appeared in either place.

As early as 1512, however, a reader noticed that the initial letters of the book's thirty-eight chapters, which were elaborately printed, constituted an acrostic: POLIAM FRATER FRANCISCVS COLVMNA PERAMAVIT, or "Brother Francesco Colonna deeply loved Polia." The same reader noted that Brother Francesco "now lives in Venice at SS. Giovanni and Paolo"—a famous house of the Dominican order. In sober fact, a priest named Francesco Colonna, who was the teacher of the Dominican novices at Treviso in 1467, later ended up in the order's more prominent house at Venice.

There he had an unusually colorful career, in the course of which he denounced several colleagues for sodomy and other crimes and was denounced in his turn for seducing a young girl. The *Hypnerotomachia* cannot—as we will see—have been completed in 1467. But these numerous and precise correspondences suggest that Francesco Colonna of Treviso wrote the nucleus of the book in the 1460s, and completed it later on. The historicist scholars of an older generation even leaped to a tidy biographical conclusion, connecting Colonna's history as a lover to the story of illicit love and punishment that he told.

All seemed clear—until Maurizio Calvesi, an iconoclastic *Hypnerotomachia* specialist, pointed out in 1980 that another Francesco Colonna had flourished in exactly the same period as the Venetian one. A member of a famous Roman noble family, this Francesco Colonna was lord of Palestrina, near Rome, from 1484 onwards. As an erudite man who took a serious interest in archaeology and architecture, the Roman Francesco Colonna—so Calvesi has argued—must really have been the author, since only he, not someone from the north, could have had the intimate knowledge of Egyptian and Roman antiquities needed to generate the text and the illustrations. Still others have attributed the *Hypnerotomachia* to even less plausible authors—including the architect and scholar Leon Battista Alberti, who had no close connection with Treviso and died in 1472, and even the gifted poet who ruled Florence in the later fifteenth century, Lorenzo de' Medici.

THE HISTORY OF the book's publication is only a little clearer than its ultimate provenance. It was printed, again, by Aldo Manuzio. An erudite and painstaking publisher, he became famous both for his defiant willingness to bring out the classics of Greek literature in the original, even though these costly, hard-to-produce wares found few buyers, and for his clever decision to produce neat little octavo editions of the Latin and Italian classics, printed in an elegant Italic type, which proved ideal for well-educated young aristocrats. They could—as one customer reported—carry them even to court and take them behind a pillar for half an hour's illicit learned reading when the opportunity arose. A great cultural impresario, reminiscent of Alfred Knopf in the pride that he took in his choice of texts to publish and in the appearance of his final products, Manuzio issued formal protests when printers in France pirated his octavos, since he considered their poor imitations of his italic font an insult. No wonder he could round up the dazzlingly skilled artisans, artist, and author needed to produce a *Gesamtkunstwerk* such as the *Hypnerotomachia*.

In fact, however, Manuzio was a purist. He preferred to publish the Greek and Roman classics. In Italian he normally printed texts in pure Tuscan: critical editions of Dante and Petrarch, and the devotional works of Saint Catherine of Siena. Though fragmentary, the evidence suggests that the *Hypnerotomachia* embarrassed him. Manuzio did not put his name or his famous seal, the emperor Vespasian's device of a dolphin wrapped about an anchor, on the title-page of this particular volume. Instead, he signed a printed errata sheet that appeared at the end of some copies. A brilliant advertiser in the first modern age of advertising—the publisher who, Erasmus said, could make or break an author's reputation by accepting a single book—Manuzio did everything to conceal his involvement in this one project.

Manuzio's willingness to publish a work of which he disapproved can be explained. He produced the *Hypnerotomachia* on commission. Leonardo Crasso, a wealthy and well-connected Venetian lawyer, wrote the prefatory letter that dedicated the book to Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino, a prominent patron of advanced art and scholarship. Crasso stated there that he had the work "printed and published at [his] own expense." And he explained exactly how it had to be read, with lexica at hand, showing a sympathy for the author's style that the printer himself evidently did not share: "It contains not only knowledge, but, as you will see, more secrets of nature than you will find in all the books of the ancients. One thing is remarkable about it: that although it speaks our tongue, in order to understand it one needs Greek and Latin no less than Tuscan and the vernacular." And so "none but the most learned," he warned, "should able to penetrate to the inner sanctum," though the less erudite could also find entertainment and instruction in the book. Manuzio may have been intrigued by aspects of the work. He certainly orchestrated its production. But Crasso financed the book and held the copyright, and Crasso's friends wrote the enthusiastic poems that appeared at the start of the text, after his preface. Manuzio probably agreed to do the book because his revenues had suffered just before, when he caught and then recovered from the plague.

COLONNA'S LANGUAGE WAS as much a product of the age of print as the illustrator's woodcuts and the type-font. Its texture shows that he cannot have completed his book in 1467, for he drew the raw materials for his pyrotechnic displays of verbal inventiveness from dictionaries, reference works, and treatises that reached print only in the 1480s and 1490s. One obsession that runs through the early part of the text is architectural. As Polifilo searches for his missing love, exploring obelisks and colossal statues, temples and courts, he describes everything that he sees in full technical detail. The disconsolate lover brandishes

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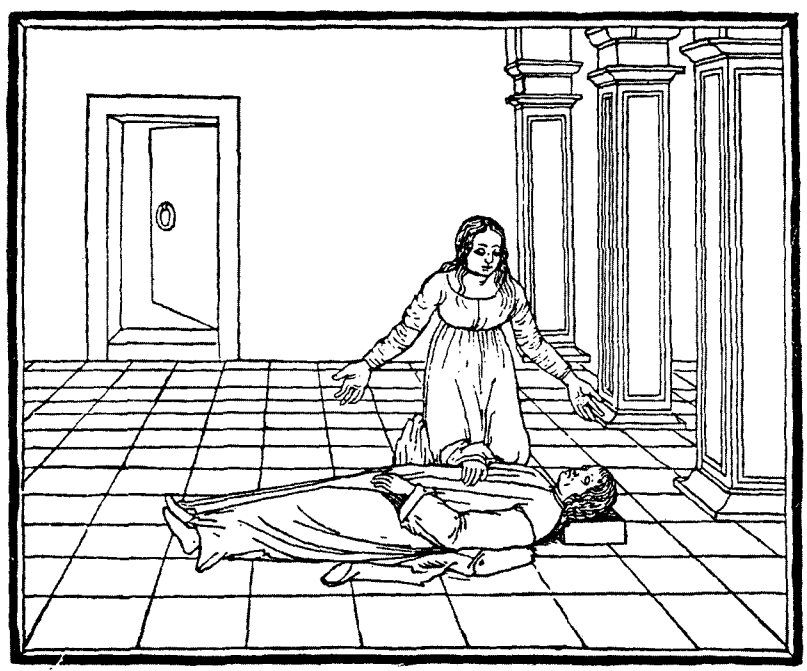
architectural terms as passionately as if they were love letters: "On the voussoirs of the portal I saw an elaborate vermiculate work, exquisitely made from vitrified tesserae." He uses this vocabulary, moreover, in a highly informed way. And he could do so because Leon Battista Alberti, a scholar and member of the papal curia, had written, in the middle decades of the fifteenth century, the massive treatise *On the Art of Building*, which rested on study both of the great Roman architectural writer Vitruvius and of ancient ruins in the city of Rome and elsewhere.

Alberti's book, which appeared in print in 1486, was an inexhaustible source of technical terms and information on the ancient art of building. Colonna drew on it freely, as later writers would draw on his book—a form of endless textual recycling commonly employed in this age of erudite content providers. But Alberti offered more than data: he also taught habits of seeing. He instructed his readers—not architects themselves, but erudite patrons and scholars—to analyze every building in terms of the impression that it made on the viewer approaching it, to examine the way it fitted its immediate situation, and how its skin of ornament fitted over the bones of its structure.

As if in a travelogue, Colonna repeatedly led the reader up, to, and away from the sites that he described: "Lifting my eyes to the place where the wooded hills seemed to meet, I saw far off an incredibly tall structure in the form of a tower . . . I could see the pleasant hills surrounding the valley rising ever higher as they neared this edifice, and seeming to join it, so that it was connected with the hills on either side and made with them an enclosed valley." And when he made Polifilo enter and describe a colossal statue of a human body, bone by bone and passage by passage, he revealed how Alberti's analysis of buildings had stimulated his own artistic imagination. Colonna transmuted the idea that each building should resemble an organic body into the image of a vast artificial human body which could be entered and studied. Colonna performed the same kind of literary alchemy, moreover, with similarly learned books of very different kinds—for example, the great Latin lexicon of the scholar Niccolò Perotti, appropriately entitled *Cornucopia*, from which he borrowed a number of rare Latin words. The whole book, in other words, is not only produced in a period visual style, but reflects again and again the author's intense, exploitative reading of the newest products of other presses. For all its nostalgic classicism, the *Hypnerotomachia* celebrates modernity—the modernity of the late fifteenth century, which took the form, as Ingrid Rowland has recently shown in her marvelous book *The Culture of High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome*, of a scholarly and creative classicism.

Colonna did not just assemble these materials and display them, like one of the mosaicists whose artistry his protagonists admired. He ingeniously used the learned disciplines of his time to explore central facets of the psyche and the temperament. Polifilo is not only a lover, he is also an antiquary. Like Cyriac of Ancona, the adventurous fifteenth-century merchant and scholar who explored the antiquities of the entire Mediterranean world, making the first drawings of the Parthenon, visiting the Ottoman Sultan and the Byzantine court, and admiring obelisks and elephants in Egypt, Polifilo wanders a landscape strewn with ruins: "a shaft without a capital, or a headless trunk of some immense column of Persian stone . . . everything was exposed to the sky and gnawed by decay and old age." Some of the imaginary ruins depicted in the *Hypnerotomachia* actually come from Cyriac's notebooks; and the whole book resembles the luxurious manuscript collections of antiquities produced for connoisseurs in the 1460s and 1470s, the years when the basic text was composed, by Cyriac's successors. Some of the best-known studies of the *Hypnerotomachia*—the works of Karl Giehlow and Charles Mitchell, and more recently those of Patricia Brown, Brian Curran, and Tamara Griggs—have been devoted to elucidating Colonna's labrynthine galleries of archaeological facts and fantasies.

Yet Polifilo's responses to many of the antiquities he sees lack the studied restraint and decorum that antiquaries normally showed. Statues, he shows, inspire him—and inspired the ancients—with lust. Inspecting a perfect image of a sleeping nymph, he lovingly describes "her plump knees slightly bent, showing her narrow feet which tempted one to reach out one's hand to stroke and tickle them," and "the nipples of her small breasts . . . from [which] spurted streams of water, cold from the right-hand one and hot from the left." Her body, he remarks, would have provoked not only the human visitors who stretched out "to suck and drink" cold water from her right breast, but even ones made of stone. In fact, a satyr appeared at her feet, "all aroused in prurient lust," as the illustration made clear.



"I had already made my eyes into lakes of tears whose steady drips soaked both him and myself, just as the brave and faithful Argia wept upon the body of her beloved Polynices."

Yet the satyr did not attack the sleeping nymph. On the contrary, he held the leafy branches of an arbutus tree in one hand, a curtain in the other, sheltering her from the sun. Provocation did not lead to rape or to seduction; restraint prevailed. It prevailed, also, in the numerous later scenes in which Polifilo was confronted by living nymphs who bathed and played with him—and, in one case, offered him a jar of cream with which he anointed his skin, only to find himself "sexually aroused and lasciviously stimulated to the point of total confusion and torment, while these wily girls, knowing what had happened to me, laughed unrestrainedly," teasing him, rolling on the flowery ground and running from him. Polifilo's torments are finally alleviated. One of the nymphs offers him a waterlily, a

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root of aron and a root of star-wort. Choosing the starwort, Polifilo eats it and feels his libidinous urges pass away. Yet they reappear again and again—especially when he encounters a young woman wearing the elaborately laced shoes which he more than once describes in panting detail.

Here—and in many other passages—the novelist entered a country that had not previously been explored by authors of prose romance or by writers about ancient art. In the fifteenth century, learned medical men and astrologers described, in scrupulous detail, the bodies and spirits of their patients. Writers such as Marsilio Ficino saw their bodies, and those of their clients, as open to influences of many kinds—those of the planets, which stimulated the intellect, the digestion, and the sexual organs; those of scents and colors; those of other people in one's environment. They prescribed complex therapies, which could involve listening to music, smelling particular aromas, and wearing astrological talismans, as well as the consumption of substances traditionally seen as of medicinal value. And they openly admitted that the sexual and psychic energies that individuals felt genuinely belonged to them—that these feelings must be controlled, and sometimes stimulated, rather than denied. Old men, indeed, might have to revive them by sucking the blood of young men or the milk of young women.

THE FIRST TREATISES by this new school of learned medical men, such as Marsilio Ficino's *Three Books on Life*, were just reaching print when Colonna revised the book that he had drafted long before in Treviso. Colonna used their methods—and their understanding of the body and the soul—to make his work an exploration of the erotics of antiquity. Ancient writers had never concealed the fact that art had a sexual appeal: Pliny, for example, told in his *Natural History* the story of Praxiteles's nude statue of Venus at Cnidus, which men—as Colonna put it—"ravished by masturbating." But Colonna placed these anecdotes into a richer, darker context. He transformed Polifilo's voyage in a landscape of nymphs and ruins into a voyage in an interior landscape of fetish and desire. The countryside of Arcadia, as Colonna brought it back to life, resembled the imaginary world of sexualized ancient gods and goddesses that Aubrey Beardsley, who knew and admired the *Hypnerotomachia*, would conjure up in another age of rapid aesthetic innovation—and the imagined world of ancient sexual acts and murders that Sigmund Freud would draw from the depths of the bourgeois psyche and its classical *Bildung*.

A masterpiece of erotics and exoticism, a daring and sensual book, the *Hypnerotomachia* shows that the Renaissance revival of classical antiquity was not a dry, bookish enterprise. It involved the work of investors and collectors, ingenious printers and brilliant artists, and self-obsessed writers. It mobilized the discoveries of scholars in the service of the artistic and sensual imagination. And it helped to set loose the imaginations of artists such as Dürer and writers such as Rabelais. Sadly, the *Hypnerotomachia* and the world from which it sprang soon encountered the powerful and antagonistic energies of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Many copies of the book were defaced, their statues of Priapus deprived of their genitalia. Its delicate story of sexual energies and sexual therapies went underground, suppressed until recent times by the difficulties of its language and the curiosity of its subject matter—and the perverse desire of scholars to carry out their own sort of reverse alchemy, turning Colonna's and Bordon's dark inquiry into the passions into a set of bone-dry bibliographical puzzles about authorship.

Godwin's translation takes us back to a fascinating, even frightening, moment, one that looks in retrospect like the first scene of a revolution in Arcadia—a moment in which classical fragments served artistic purposes as radical as they would again, 400 years later, when Modernist patrons, artists, and entrepreneurs collaborated to shock public taste and advance the possibilities of art. Colonna and Bordon—whichever Colonna it was, and if it was Bordon at all—and Manuzio and Crasso laid the eggs that Freud and Klimt and Pound and Eliot would hatch. Exploring ancient ruins, reading ancient texts, carrying on explorations already begun by writers such as Ficino and artists such as Botticelli, these men of the late fifteenth century detected wonderful and terrible energies, at once religious and sexual, where later generations would see only noble silence and stillness. These were the forgotten energies that Aby Warburg rediscovered when he studied Colonna's work and its context. The "revival of classical antiquity": the standard formula is too cold and too distanced to describe this hot and eerie book. ■

American Booty

By DALE PECK

Don't the Moon Look Lonesome: A Novel in Blues and Swing by Stanley Crouch

(Pantheon, 546 pp., $26.95)

I.

SOMETIMES A BAD novel is a gift. This is particularly evident when that novel is written by a writer as ambitious as Stanley Crouch. Here is a book with much to say about three of our culture's most important social and literary themes—race, art, and love; and, when one has sifted through the bombast and the clumsiness to the truisms that lurk at the heart of this big book like minnows in a deep and muddy river, one does see what is wrong with American society in general and with American literature in particular. For lack of a better term, I will call it the problem of false pretenses. If only chronology were irrelevant to judgment, and the novel were its subject rather than the words: then *Lo's Diary* would be just as good as *Lolita*, and *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome* would be as important as *Invisible Man*.

Not since Donna Tartt's "*Il miglior fabbro*" to Gary Fisketjohn has a novel started with such a shoulder-rubbing dedication: "For Albert Murray, Ralph Ellison, and Saul Bellow, mentors all." *The Secret History* had at least the distinction of being a well-written thriller; but *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome* is neither well-written nor thrilling. In fact, the novel is essentially plotless, being concerned with issues rather than stories, the primary issue being the thesis that we are all different yet all the same, so get over it already.

Crouch's subjects are African- and occasionally other Americans; music, mainly

DALE PECK's most recent novel is *Now It's Time to Say Goodbye*.

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jazz, but music in Crouch's world seems representative of the ideal state of art; and interracial heterosexuality, specifically the black-man-on-top-of-white-woman variety, oh my. The white woman, an aspiring jazz singer named Carla, is the protagonist of the novel, but it is more useful to think of her as the moon of the novel's title, the lone spot of white in a vast field of blackness. For Carla is less an aspiring anything than a figure resembling Norman Mailer's white Negro of a few decades ago. She doesn't just sing black, she also dates black, befriends black, cooks black, and, best of all, looks black—at least, as far as her boyfriend is concerned, where it counts: "In the black night of their home Maxwell always endeared himself to her when she lay naked on her stomach and he slowly rubbed and gently squeezed her backside while whispering, 'I know my dog by the way he barks, I know my baby from the feeling in the dark.'"

Maxwell doesn't always speak in couplets, nor does Crouch always write in them (or, I should say, quote in them, since Crouch's couplets, like his title, are borrowed from jazz songs). But pairs and polarities in this novel about race (in Crouch's America there are only two races that matter, in much the same way that television has the Big Three and then those other networks) are more than a little in evidence, most notably in the person of Carla—who, it turns out, is a woman possessed of an "anatomical anomaly." To put it as bluntly as a friend of Maxwell's does, she's "a blonde with a black ass."

THIS INFORMATION MUST be given its context. Here is the order of facts presented to us about Carla: we learn first, that she is white; second, that she has a black boyfriend; third, that problems have arisen in the relationship because of this discrepancy in skin tone; fourth, that "couldn't nobody tell [she] was white if all they got to see was the shadow of her profile"; fifth, that she has enjoyed Negro music since her girlhood days as "a local skating whiz who showed Olympic potential"; and sixth, that she is an aspiring jazz singer. In short, she is a step above a talking Barbie; she actually sleeps with her black friend, as opposed to hanging out with him in the Malibu beach house.

But the dozens of references to Carla's gigantic boody—Crouch's spelling; I always use a "t" myself—do more than eroticize her. They embody a theme that Crouch first articulated a few years ago in *The All-American Skin Game*, namely, that "the grand shindig of American civilization" is a product of miscegenation. And so race, far from being a hindrance in love, is the ideal way to spice up the pot. In life, who can say? But in this novel, we have only the evidence that the author provides, and those clues seem to lead to the following conclusion: Carla's whiteness is in fact irrelevant to her relationship with Maxwell, because it isn't real—the only thing white about Carla is her "mannish" Aryan sister, preparing for the "race war" out there in Ohio, and you can be sure her ass is as flat as Twiggy's—and because Carla has already submitted to black culture in the most primal sense. Boyfriend Maxwell, at any rate, is possessed of "the conqueror's spirit," which is to say, he is "not the kind of man who can feel comfortable under a woman," a fact that Carla acknowledges explicitly.

> "Carla..."
> "Yes, sweetheart."
> "You know you couldn't hold me if I didn't want you to hold me."
> "I know."
> "But I would have had to hurt you, baby."
> "Yes, you would. Right here."
> "I love you too much for that."
> "I know that. Maxwell..."
> "Yes, baby."
> "Oh, I don't know. I just love you. I just love you so much."

So Carla has submitted to her man. But to what end? In lieu of a love that is testified to but never witnessed, what we are left with is music. Maxwell is a tenor saxophonist, further along in his career than Carla, and, like her last boyfriend, the dead drummer Bobo, he uses his "horn" to "intimidate" Carla, and so bring her to a deeper understanding of her art:

> Soaking in rhythm and stroking it and coming to know herself through it was what she had done—each ounce of her body carrying and sending the beat, from her big toes all the way under to the heels of her feet and up her ankles, then her legs, around the horn of her behind, up her spine and shoulders, scaling the vertebrae of her neck, the round back of her head, across the scalp, down her forehead, zooming off her nose, swinging back to her lips, gliding on down to her chin, dropping to her breast bone, then to each of her full but not heavy breasts, moving onto her belly, the beat crossing the pubic thatch that guarded her lower lips until...

until just when you think Crouch is finally going to give his readers a taste of the miscegenated shindig they have awaited for more than three hundred pages,

> that beat disappeared through the invincible space between her vagina and the

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> tops of her thighs: that concave cupping of air, never less than open, regardless of how close she held her legs together.

This passage is perhaps the most literal evocation of the rhythm method I've ever encountered. It's so fascinatingly Jungian that it's hard to put down, a true rape of anima by animus; but not even this juggernaut of phallocentric conceit can hide the fact that Crouch, for all his declarations in support of assimilation, is less interested in the union of black and white than in the inability of white people to consummate that union. From the back there is that sterile "Negroid boody," from the front a decoy vagina in which Maxwell's seed is continually wasted. And yet there is no hint of blame in Crouch's descriptions: here is Carla, ready for whatever her man has to give, even pain.

In his essays, Crouch repeatedly insists that "black Americans have had to scale, bore through, or detonate the prejudicial walls that blocked access to the banquet of relatively unlimited social advancement that we acknowledge as the grand inspirational myth of American life," a mixed metaphor of such bland grandiosity (barbarians at the gates, a place at the table, I have a dream) that it raises suspicion in the reader's mind. But it is his fiction that reveals Crouch's vision of American history to be, just like his women, full of holes. For whatever the coupling of black and white, the very nature of the union renders the product sterile and ungainly as a mule.

II.

Of course there is a plot. Stanley Crouch, like other social critics who treat fiction as an appendix to their field, has resorted to realism, because realism, like social criticism, is seen to lend itself to the reductive, instructive narrative. The reduction is that Carla is afraid Maxwell will leave her because she is white, but he doesn't leave her. The instruction is that it would be wrong for Maxwell to leave Carla as a consequence of her skin color, because race shouldn't interfere with love.

It's hard to render the story more fully than that. There are set pieces—a trip to Houston to visit Maxwell's parents; the return to New York City; bouts of drinking in various bars in various cities—but these diversions are almost wholly unrelated to the development of the characters and the relationship between them. Thus, on the second page of the novel we are told that after five years together "[e]verything the two knew about the other had become secondary to his being black and her being white," but four hundred pages later all we've learned is that Maxwell is "still sliding away." It takes another twenty pages before we learn that Maxwell had heretofore been "above the silly aspects of race, but in that last year before they traveled to visit Eunice and Ezekiel, he began hanging out with a different crowd." This "different crowd" is never seen, but it is presumably under their tutelage that

> instead of being philosophical about on-duty cabs passing him up, or calmly telling off white people who tried to step in front of him in lines, Maxwell became extremely angry, returning home with one tale after another of how tired he was of eating shit just because his skin was dark. He started using some of those clichés that he used to make fun of, that "us versus them" philosophy that usually demanded certain kinds of ethnic costumes and body oils and hairstyles in order to make the clear point that these Americans were neither white people nor black people who had been overcome by white society. They were not anybody's black Anglo-Saxons. Or so they thought. To her dismay, especially since she was still dreaming of having a child, Maxwell sneered about the "almost niggers," "the not quite niggers," the "I-wish-I-was niggers" who had been so bleached out inside that their skin was just a husk, an ethnic mirage. They were black on the outside but corny as Kansas in the summertime. The contempt he showed for such people in his conversation when they appeared on television or in restaurants or came up to him asking for an autograph after a performance was incrementally frightening. It was as if, out of nowhere, he began to accept some old-fashioned idea about the complete separateness of black and white.

This paragraph, with its cobbled-together "clichés" and "old-fashioned ideas," comes 427 pages into a 530-page novel, and it is the closest thing we get to illustration or explanation of Maxwell's "sliding away," a slide that continues for another seventy pages or so with phrases such as "and on it went," and "for a while," until "out of nowhere"—and in a phone call, no less—a contrite Maxwell declares that "Ezekiel did not raise me to turn and run from the woman I love. Not for no niggers, not for no crackers, not for no dadgum body.'"

When Carla asks what had caused him to become concerned about her race in the first place—perhaps she, like the reader, is wondering what shadow conflict has been endured and overcome—all Maxwell says is, "I wanted to be something somebody was telling me to be"; but that "somebody" is as elusive as the "different crowd" that he's been "hanging out with," as hard to pin down as "these Americans" and "such people" and the ever-present "they" who people Maxwell's "'us versus them' philosophy." But no matter. "[H]er loneliness had been put on hold. Ooo, ooo, ooo: what a little mush on a moonstruck night will do." Crouch's allusive couplets tend to appear when there's a point to be made—or rather, to be missed.

But to focus on plot would be to miss the point along with him. Plot is only a skeleton in the modern novel, and a fragile one at that, right? As in *Ulysses*—whose banner headlines from the Telegraph Office chapter Crouch borrows for a set piece on a Negro church service—the flesh and blood of this novel are its diversions, almost all of which appear as recollections, "the marching legions of memory as they came to attack or rescue or soothe or mystify." Thus we are treated to multi-page descriptions of music ("His melodies might be long balletic bounds of sustained notes that sailed up over the meter"; "the drummer ... had a sexy little triplet bouncing off of his snare that made her feel as if she were being patted on the ass") or art ("The flowers on canvas could lift you into the region of spiritual confidence that radiates from beauty so pure one would think those brushstrokes could turn a jar of piss into apple juice"; "it was a one-to-one relationship made successful or a failure by a third factor, that painter just as alone as Daniel Boone shouting at the top of a valley.")

Often these descriptions are couched in faux-Platonic dialogues between tongue-loosened drunks; and these dialogues allow Crouch to make even more preposterous pronouncements than he could in his own voice. For example, the origin of *misogyny*: "The moment in bed. That's where misogyny starts: when a guy goes through all of that and the pussy's not shit." For example, homosexuality and the abuse of freedom: "There were naked men with bleeding feet hoisted up from the floor and held by chains that formed seats from which their asses hung out. On the floor were cans of Crisco. Men would scoop out the right amount of Crisco and rub it on their forearms and the backs of their hands. Then they would push their fists up the rectums of the men sitting in the seats of the chains." For example, gridlock, Judaism, and the politics of guilt-tripping: "You sweat through that and the fucking pollution of all those cars making you feel like you know something, a little bit anyway, about the gas chambers some of these Jews always use as an I've-been-fucked-over-more-than-

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you credit card." And, of course, race relations, and Crouch's particular fascination with miscegenation: "the white boys who imitated the swaggering simian moves and gestures, bad taste, and worse behavior of rappers"; "these black kids wearing the false faces in a carnival of street niggerism ... played into the hands of racists, or with all their adolescent energy, created so much disgust and fear, they helped breed racism"; "she was still full of that special sass and vinegar too many lost when they climbed up into the penthouse. No deracinated Negress was she."

I could go on, but why? Suffice it to say that here is one black man calling other black men monkeys, denying blackness to those African Americans who fail to live up to his standards and conferring it on those who do. All this from a writer who has proclaimed that American fiction should represent a "far, far richer sense of the inner lives that give our nation its particular complexity." This sentiment is grossly belied by Crouch's own attempt at rendering that "far, far richer sense." One closes *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome* with less sense of its characters' inner lives than of its author's need to swing back and forth between the roles of assimilationist peacemaker and agent provocateur. By which I mean that when I read Crouch's dismissal of Malcolm X's "absolutely inaccurate juxtaposition" of house niggers and field niggers in *The All-American Skin Game*, I couldn't help but think of that old adage about the pot and the kettle.

III.

LET'S BE BLUNT. *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome* is a terrible novel, badly conceived, badly executed, and put forward in bad faith; reviewing it is like shooting fish in a barrel. This doesn't mean Crouch is always or even often wrong in his opinions. In fact, I agree completely with his novel's premise: race shouldn't be a hindrance in love—nor in life, for that matter—but it sometimes is, and when that happens the parties involved should do everything to ameliorate the problem. Such a treatise seems hardly worth the trouble of a novel, especially in this day and age; but then Stanley Crouch isn't just another bad novelist.

If one were being generous, one could describe Crouch's agenda as nothing less than the ranking of the accomplishments of black culture; but that would be, again, missing the point. In fact most of Crouch's efforts, in this novel and in his essays, seem to me far more concerned with establishing his own authority to compile his specious list. Whether he's talking about Maxwell and Carla or O.J. and Nicole, the rightness or the wrongness of his evaluation always gives way to getting over, getting a rise, scoring points off his opponent. In the end, Crouch's anti-p.c. polemic comes across as a veil behind which he makes the kinds of criticisms of African American culture that white Americans are too cowed—or maybe just too smart—to put forward themselves.

In fact, Crouch's stance resembles nothing so much as hip-hop—though Crouch's rhetorical theater is less sophisticated than that of the current generation of black musicians he so loathes. Hip-hop's iconography and lexicography present a romanticized version of ghetto life to its white audience while simultaneously appropriating, inflating, and parroting the trappings of bourgeois wealth to its black fans; and if you think that's lame, compare it to Crouch's scorecarding of good Negroes (Albert Murray, Ralph Ellison, Johnnie Cochran), bad Negroes (James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Christopher Darden), and fence-straddlers (Richard Wright, O.J. Simpson). Crouch is a writer who plays fast and loose with his words, deflecting examination by accusing his enemies of the tactics he uses himself. For example, he denounces James Baldwin as a "professional Negro" who "engages" by "harangue," "selling out to hysterical alienation by so overstating the case that the issue is smudged beyond recognition." Whatever one thinks of Baldwin, the description applies perfectly to Crouch himself, especially if you change the word "alienation" to "assimilation."

IMPLICIT IN THIS posturing is a canonical self-presentation ("This, my second book of essays, is dedicated to my mother, Emma Bea Crouch, who died a few years ago on Bloomsday, symbolizing for me the essential role she had played in my development as a writer") that rests less on a sense of personal ability than on what Crouch, like almost every writer since Zora Neale Hurston, has called the "lyricism of black American culture." In an essay on Albert Murray in *Always in Pursuit*, Crouch quotes his subject's observation that "no other people in the land have as yet evolved a characteristic idiom that reflects a more open, robust, and affirmative disposition toward diversity and change. Nor is any other idiom more smoothly geared to open-minded improvisation. Moreover, never has improvisation been more conditioned by esthetic values." This is a declaration that reeks of professional jingoism of the type Crouch sees in Baldwin and his heirs. In such a vision, a black person's every utterance is both a moral pronouncement and an aesthetic event, and to fail at it is somehow to fail at being black. And yet here is a writer who says that someone "experienced extreme anger" instead of got mad. His characters are always "answering in the affirmative" instead of just saying yes, possibly as part of the effort of "maintaining intimacy"; and they can't even glance at FDR Drive without remembering that it was "named after the man who had supplied the money for the Triborough to be finished and had put many New Yorkers back to work during the Depression by federally financing all manner of building."

More serious, though, is the sentimental sleight of hand that characterizes Crouch's polemic. His method is to attack various generalities—Malcolm X's categories of house and field slaves; W.E.B. DuBois's notion of an African American as a person with two souls, "one American, one Negro"—with the classic one-two of slippery discourse. He first dismisses them as generalities, which clearly they are, and then he makes the general statement that these and other tropes have no basis in reality, which clearly they do. This is essentially the rhetoric of political speechifying, and for the life of me I've never been able to figure out why readers succumb to it over and over again, besides the fact that the effort of refuting it reduces you to a nitpicking pedantry that can drive you insane after a while.

Still, for the sake of thoroughness, let's consider one example, from the essay on Albert Murray quoted earlier. In this essay, Crouch is presumably explaining the way Northerners view Southern violence:

> The relationship of pride to bloodlust was transmuted into the vision of mad gallantry that took John Brown to Harper's Ferry and made possible those reckless attacks by Confederate troops that resulted in the green fields turned red by the gore of defeat, defeat at the hands of Yankees, Midwestern farm boys and Northern kids scooped up out of the cities, all backed up by the indispensable help of the Negro, whose freedom was the issue of that war in the first place. The South is where most of the Civil War battles were fought and where Washington, D.C., is located. So we too frequently see the South as a place of dislocation and barbarism, imbecility and decadence. We, presumptively perched in the alto and soprano reaches of the nation, look upon Southerners, the residents of the bass clef, with a mix of pity and contempt.

Now, John Brown was a Northerner, born in Ohio and first attaining historical prominence with the door-to-door murder of five pro-slavery men in Kansas. And when Robert E. Lee attacked the fort that Brown held at Harper's Ferry in 1859, it was Lee—then still in the employ of the

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Of ladies who lost their old-fashioned ideas
And other branches stripped of bark, looking
Neither to left nor right while walking the forest
After waking late: avenge O lord thy servant's
Stolen silk. At some point a sibyl will say, to no one
In particular, this house contains nothing, not even
The women who live here. Yet others will notice too,
Squinting through drizzle at fluted penny vaults
Blanched by moonlight itself in a state of erosion.
And no one can tell, she'll continue, how many
Hallways are in that place, they seem to be moving.
Each will wander the courtyard guarded by headless
Virgins and charioteers drinking an orient liquor,
As snow fills every space in the valley, even the one
The river is rushing away from, unlocked like a jaw.

Andrew Zawacki

only American government in existence—who won, and had Brown hanged. What "mad gallantry" and "recklessness" had to do with either side's actions is unclear. If Crouch's point is that John Brown somehow started the War of the Rebellion, as Northerners called it at the time, then he's off by two years and is rendering history as simplistically as when he says that freeing the slaves was "the issue" of the war. Lincoln never hid his motivation for declaring war ("If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it..."); his Emancipation Proclamation did not even apply to slaves in those states (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri) that had not joined the Confederacy, and in fact one of the prime motivating factors in the Proclamation was the hope that it would deter Southern slaves from helping their masters in what the Virginia grandfather of a friend of mine called the War of Northern Aggression to his dying day. In fact, most of the battles of what was also called the War Between the States, the War of Secession, and the War for Southern Independence did take place in the South, just as most of the battles in World War II took place in Europe, but why the former should be rendered "a place of dislocation and barbarism, imbecility and decadence" while the latter is the birthplace of all the ideas "that were expanded and refined in order to adjust to the intricacies of human experience, action, conflict, and ambition within these United States" is, like so much else in this single paragraph, unclear.

And then, finally, there is the conceit about "the alto and soprano reaches of the nation" looking down on "the residents of the bass clef." This particular metaphorical construction is the most often repeated stylistic formula that Crouch uses in his polemical writing and in his fiction, starting with the dedication page ("TO JUDY JOYCE, whose knowledge of food service and sailing helped me caulk the hull of one chapter") to the last paragraph of the last page of the novel ("The emotion that those tunes allowed her to free nearly lifted Carla up off the floor and sent the girl from South Dakota safely sailing out of the window, like the very first dinosaur who ever learned how to use her wings"). It is difficult to figure out why exactly, especially given the strange places that these sentences tend to end up. Dinosaurs? Learning to use their wings? And this relates to Carla's happiness *how*?

My hunch is that it has something to do with the fact that Crouch's book is subtitled "A Novel in Blues and Swing." Something to do with jazz, in other words, which is somehow made an ancillary subject to every topic Crouch has written on, from Ellison to O.J.; something to do with improvisation, which Crouch has elsewhere declared as "very important to my vision of life in our time." In fact, "important" doesn't begin to capture his feelings on the subject: "I believe that one of the central intellectual shortcomings of American life is the fact that so little has been done with the flexible profundity of jazz metaphor."

And so we come to what might possibly be the one justifiable raison d'être for this novel—not theme, not narrative, not sex, not politics, but aesthetics, specifically an improvisational jazz aesthetic that Crouch believes is "not only about transforming pulp frogs, [but] also about slaying the dragon and making cuisine out of his corpse." (The dragon, by the way, is "our industrial world," and if that doesn't clear things up, I'm sorry.) In essay after essay, Crouch carries the torch for jazz, calling it not only the greatest American musical form—which seems as safely incontestable as his assertion that "black Americans have had to scale, bore through, or detonate ... prejudicial walls"—but also a potential source of inspiration for all the arts, a model for all that is good, true, beautiful. The problem is that Crouch is right: jazz has *not* had the kind of ramifying cultural impact lesser art forms have had, and the same is true of the notions of improvisation and individuality he sees as metaphorically attendant upon it.

To some degree, Crouch's question begs its own answer. After all, what aspect of composition *isn't* improvisation? Don't we make it all up, from narrative to character to the sentences and the metaphors that we use to describe them? And he seems to be missing another obvious point: writing isn't music. It isn't performed. Novels, unlike scores, can't be interpreted, can't be improvised once printed. A novel, even more than a painting or sculpture, which can deteriorate with time, is the most reified of all art forms—a point poignantly rendered in Nabokov's "Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer."

Turning the novel into a jazz composition would require more than Crouch's formal, uh, innovation, which, though it aims to connote freedom, spontaneity, and improvisation, comes across as merely unrevised. It would require an intermediary figure between reader and writer, a performer who not only adds inflection and emphasis, but also has the freedom to change words as he sees fit, shuffle sentences and paragraphs. Perhaps he would end this particular book on a more realistic note, or cut out the middle four hundred pages, since they do little more than repeat themselves over and over again.

But there is a deeper problem inherent in Crouch's use of the jazz metaphor. Crouch claims to believe in improvisation, but what he really believes in is idiosyncracy—that is, individuality; and when this notion is examined further, it becomes clear that what Crouch really believes in is The Individual, the one to whom all other individuals should aspire. In other words, jazz is an improvisational musical form encouraging individual expression on the bandstand. Yet a belief in jazz culture is a codified and largely dated way of life—which is why all those references to cool cats and jive turkeys in Baldwin now make us wince. Charlie Parker was an individual, but all those jazzmen who play in the style of Bird are not. Ralph Ellison was an individual; Stanley Crouch, his student, is not. Crouch claims to be inventing a new kind of writing, but the truth is he's just itching to join the club.

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And when he says his new writing is a jazz derivative, "a novel in blues and swing," what he's really doing is using Hurston's "lyricism of black American culture" as a way of deflecting examination—criticize me, and you criticize black culture—a pose which, though less blunt than the letter-writing campaign protesting the neglect of Toni Morrison for the National Book Award in 1987, is no less political, and no closer to actual questions of quality.

As far as I can tell, the only useful lesson of which Stanley Crouch's novel reminds us is this: in art, you can't fake it. And while I'm sure there are still people who condemn interracial relationships, I doubt many of them will be reading this novel, and so it is that in response to the question in the novel's title one wants to answer "No," simply, wearily, but also sternly. "It *doesn't*." ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 5

moment, all were inherently capable and deserving of democracy. For Jefferson, democracy was "the last word."

I did ignore the last essay in Kaplan's collection. Had I included it, I would have had to suggest that Kaplan is confused and unaware of glaring contradictions in his work. What is one to think when the self-described "tragic realist," the disdainful debunker of Western humanitarian pretensions, the prophet of liberalism's doom, suddenly starts writing about the forces of good versus the forces of evil and calls for a "global constabulary force ... to intervene in humanitarian emergencies"? I thought it better to explicate the consistent themes in Kaplan's writings over time and to ignore the unexplained repudiation of those themes in one lonely essay.

In my review, I noted that Kaplan's grasp of history and political philosophy is slender. He now compounds his errors. To take one small but typical example, Kaplan does not understand the difference between the "state system" erected by the Treaty of Westphalia and the historical origins of "organized nation-states." The "state system" to which the Columbia Encyclopedia refers describes the way the European nation-states related to one another after the religious wars concluded in 1648. The Treaty of Westphalia, as Hans Morgenthau has explained, established the "rules of international law laying down the rights and duties of states in relation to each other." But the "organized nation-state" predates Westphalia by a century or more, as Morgenthau also notes. Kaplan admires the realists and has learned from them that something significant happened in 1648. He remains confused about precisely what.

Of greater moment is Kaplan's obtuse misreading of the Founders, whom he consistently depicts as eighteenth-century versions of Lee Kuan Yew. I would love to know what Kaplan thinks he means when he writes that the Founders were "intrigued" by ancient Sparta's longevity. If they were intrigued by anything, it was the Spartan regime's ability to instill civic virtue in the people. But the Founders explicitly rejected Sparta as a model, recognizing, as Kaplan does not, the essentially totalitarian quality of Spartan society. Jefferson called it "the rule of military monks over the laboring class of the people, reduced to abject slavery." Hamilton wrote that "Sparta was little better than a well regulated camp" and that Americans "might as soon reconcile ourselves to the Spartan community of goods and wives" as to Spartan notions of civic virtue. The Founders valued stability, but, unlike Kaplan, they valued liberty more.

In his book, Kaplan cites Tocqueville in support of his assertion that democracy may not survive. But Tocqueville was making a more subtle and interesting point: not that democracy might perish but that a form of "democratic despotism" might develop within democracy itself. Tocqueville made clear that what he was describing bore no relation to despotism as commonly understood, that "the old words *despotism* and *tyranny* are inappropriate" to explain what he meant. It's too paradoxical for Kaplan. Here and elsewhere, he loses his way among the subtleties of great political thinkers.

Test case

TO THE EDITORS:

Jonathan Weisman's article about the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills ("Only a Test," April 10) raises important caution flags about "high stakes" testing. But Weisman's analysis illustrates another—and perhaps more disturbing—example of how test results can be misleading. Summarizing the RAND study, he writes, "While TAAS had shown virtually no correlation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement, the RAND tests showed a correlation that nearly reached the statistical limit." I assume he means that the RAND test showed the kind of gap one typically finds on tests of this sort, while the achievement gap on TAAS was remarkably small. Indeed, the speed and magnitude of the convergence in scores on TAAS is surprising. But what's troubling is Weisman's suggestion that such convergence can result only from teaching to the test or other mischief and not from real gains in student learning. The undertone to this part of his story is that the test-score gap reflects some law of nature; thus evidence of progress in reducing the effects of poverty on achievement must always be suspect.

It is foolish to use questionable test scores to claim that educational inequality has suddenly been eradicated. We don't need more excuses for complacency, nor do we benefit from setting unrealistic expectations for improvement. However, to suggest that a significant decline in the achievement gap between poor and affluent students is always the smoking gun of measurement error or intentional manipulation is dangerous. This kind of rhetoric can undermine reform, erode support for investment in public education, and reinforce the myth that academic ability is given and immutable. Perhaps worst of all, it can exacerbate the fears of poor and minority students that they can't win no matter how they do on the tests: low scores are predictable and spell failure, but high scores are too good to be real!

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TO THE EDITORS:

Jonathan Weisman faults numerous aspects of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills state standardized testing program. However, Weisman then goes on to criticize Maryland's School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), writing that "only one school" in the state has adopted the "core knowledge" curriculum (one of several curriculum projects statewide that support MSPAP). In fact, 48 Maryland schools have adapted the "Little Red School House" model and/or the New American Schools Initiative, both of which utilize the core-knowledge curriculum. Further, Maryland enforces an extremely limited system of exemptions from the test and supports the concept of all students taking MSPAP tests. MSPAP scores statewide have made steady gains during the seven-year testing program. The state was recently awarded a "Gold Star" by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for a five-point improvement in fourth-grade reading scores on the 1998 NAEP exam since 1992—among the top five improvements in the nation.

NANCY S. GRASMICK
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Faith-Based

THIS MONTH, JUST AS CENsus nostalgia kicks in, 90,000 lucky Americans will receive a telephone call from the National Jewish Population Study 2000. The first full-scale demographic survey of American Jewry in ten years, the study hopes to shed light on everything from patterns of philanthropic giving to rates of synagogue attendance. But one set of survey numbers will draw most of the attention. In 1990 the study came up with a figure that, in the hands of Jewish parents nationwide, has been wielded with all the subtlety of a mace: the 52 percent intermarriage rate. The figure shocked the American Jewish community and was thrust in the face of countless adolescents as they preened before dates. It led to all sorts of panic over "The Vanishing American Jew" (to quote the apocalyptic title of one book) and inspired myriad efforts at outreach and spiritual renewal. Since then, however, a number of critics, most notably Hebrew University sociologist Steven M. Cohen, have challenged the number as, at best, lacking in nuance (to the question of whether an interviewee was raised Jewish, the survey recognized only answers of yes or no), and, at worst, deriving from shoddy demographics (some of the calls were made during the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, when Orthodox Jews are forbidden to use the telephone). The real intermarriage figure, critics suggest, could be as much as 20 points lower. Partly because of these objections, the current study was postponed for four months while its format was reviewed. And I for one don't mind waiting if it means conclusive proof that, as an American Jew, I am not vanishing.

AND YET, EVEN IF INTERMARRIAGE rates remain high, I doubt American Jewry will react as desperately this time. Much has changed in the last ten years. Identity politics is less chic, and, as a result, hostility toward intermarriage is more often considered uncouth, parochial, and anti-democratic. We used to feel guilty about intermarriage; now, it seems, we feel guilty about feeling guilty about it.

AT LEAST THAT'S ONE OF THE MESsages I gleaned from *Keeping the Faith*, the moralizing romantic comedy starring Edward Norton and Ben Stiller. The film's premise cribs the outline of the classic bar joke: the one about the rabbi, the priest, and the blonde. Norton (the priest) and Stiller (the rabbi) are friends from elementary school who meet up in New York. Each struggles to introduce his congregation, dozing beneath heavy blankets of tradition, to the hipness of faith. And so they entertain as much as they minister: the rabbi recruits a Harlem gospel choir to burst through his synagogue's doors; the priest ambles around the podium with a mike like a stand-up comic. But the movie is not concerned as much with the two men's clerical duties as with their love lives. The priest struggles nobly with his vows in a city of beautiful women. The rabbi struggles to parry the relentless assaults on his datebook from Jewish mothers seeking to match him up with their daughters.

THINGS GET COMPLICATED WHEN Anna, the blonde, arrives on the scene. A pal of both the rabbi's and the priest's from school, she's now a high-powered businesswoman, not to mention a gentile. And, of course, both the rabbi and the priest fall in love with her. She favors the rabbi, and the two begin a scorching affair, which they keep secret from both the priest's and the rabbi's prying congregants. The rabbi is torn—his mother has already disowned his brother for marrying a Catholic, and the congregation is keen for him to meet a nice Jewish girl—but eventually he succumbs "and follows his heart." Near the film's emotional climax, he visits his mother in the hospital, expecting a reprimand. Instead, she tells him sweetly, "I was wrong. You are a good man."

BUT COULD HE STILL HAVE BEEN A good man if he had dumped Anna? I'd like to think so. And yet, ever since the controversy over Bob Jones University's ban on interracial dating, the punditocracy seems convinced that ethnicity has no place in romance. In a recent article in the *New York Observer*, for example, Philip Weiss brandishes the Bob Jones analogy, suggesting that if Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, ever makes Al Gore's veep shortlist, he'll have to defend Orthodoxy's strict stance against intermarriage. In denouncing that stance, Weiss quotes a "lawyer active in Jewish organizations" who echoes mainstream America's contemptuous attitude toward the religious right: "Every religion has wacky stuff."

WEISS REVEALS THAT HE HIMSELF married a non-Jew, and he rails against the Jewish community's "xenophobic" and disdainful reaction to that choice. "The rhetoric and practices surrounding opposition to intermarriage are often so discriminatory they seem to border on racism," he complains. As evidence, he recounts a Sabbath dinner he recently attended at which a prominent psychology professor—"a sophisticated intellectual," no less—reacted to the news of his young daughter's crush on a "Scott Murphy" with the exclamation, "That's not a Jewish name, is it?"

I'LL BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THERE IS something wacky about hinging a people's destiny on an individual's romantic inclinations. Men and women are much more than their religious identities, and the choice of a mate should be based on the satisfaction of many needs. Likewise, religious commitments are sometimes used as a cover for true bigotry: some Jewish parents say they don't want their children to marry a non-Jew when what they really fear is that they will marry someone nonwhite. But, these qualifications notwithstanding, the desire to marry and to raise a family with someone who shares one's religious heritage is not necessarily a manifestation of intolerance or even of love's surrender to the deadening forces of tradition. I cannot separate romantic love from my love of tradition and family and heritage. The movies tend to celebrate romantic love only when it battles, and defeats, the other commitments that define one's life. But love for another person is no less noble when it enhances preexisting identity than when it trumps it. The choice to marry within one's religion should not be imposed, but neither should it be a source of shame.

THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT *KEEPING the Faith* refuses to recognize. It blithely equates spiritual inauthenticity with the supposed parochialism of the Upper West Side dating scene. A disciplined dedication to tradition is assumed to be at odds with the preservation of a free and feeling heart. And so, in one of the film's final scenes, the rabbi addresses the congregation on Yom Kippur and comes clean. There is something almost insulting about the choice of the holiest day of the Jewish year as the occasion for the film's neat wrap-up, but it is of a piece with the movie's dismissive attitude toward religion in general. After making a few lame jokes, the rabbi confesses his relationship with Anna. The congregation nods approvingly, touched by his sincerity. And who am I to argue with a Jewish mother? He might be a good man. But his is not the only way.

BENJAMIN SOSKIS

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